



REAPER SCANS

TITAN



NOVEL BY PONDMAN

HUNTER ACADEMY'S BATTLE GOD

Hunter Academy's Battle God

– 헌터 아카데미의 최강 투신 –

- VOLUME 3 -

-AUTHOR-

Pond Man

연못맨

[Reaper Scans]

Chapter 101

Sky hotel...

The Association had reserved the hotel's suite room, and a woman wearing formal clothes was waiting for them at the desk.

"Here's your 7th floor reservation. I hope you have a good time."

The Hunter Association had reserved an entire floor for the participants to stay in.

"Woah, all of this..." Amy exclaimed in surprise.

"Wow... The room is v-very big!"

Sumire was surprised by the facilities.

Kim EunAh, who was the daughter of a jaebol family, looked at the hotel with her arms crossed.

"Well, this much should be good enough."

"Come on, don't be like that~ You should be excited!"

Amy looked at EunHa, a smile on her face.

"There are only five people... Was there a need to borrow 12 rooms?"

Shin YuSung was worried about the Association spending too much money. They heard high heels approaching.

Tap tap.

Slim legs were visible beneath the traditional Chinese dress.

It was Academy City's Association Branch Manager, Mei Lin.

"You all have the right to receive this kind of treatment."

"Of course we do. Also, all of the money my grandfather donated to the Association could probably buy this building a couple of times over."

Kim EunAh touched her nerves a bit, but Mei Lin tried to hold back and smiled.

"Mr. Kim SukHan is definitely helping the Hunter Association a lot."

"Did you hear that?" Kim EunAh asked proudly.

Amy began poking fun at Kim EunAh.

"Woah~ Impressive~ EunAh, you're the best~"

Sumire smiled awkwardly.

"Ah, also... The Japanese team is staying on the 6th floor, so please avoid getting into trouble."

Sumire's expression hardened after hearing Mei Lin's explanation. You could see that she was feeling nervous. Shin YuSung's senses were sharp, so he saw her trembling.

'Sumire... '

The Sumire Shin YuSung had seen was getting stronger faster than anyone else. Not only were her skills getting better; she was also starting to confront her inner trauma,^bBut Sumire's hands were still trembling.

"Then I'll see you tomorrow."

As Mei Lin walked off, Kim EunAh looked at the lodging and then turned to the elevator.

"I need to go somewhere for the time being. Decide the rooms on your own."

"Huh? EunAh, where are you going?"

As Amy asked her where she was going, Kim EunAh waved her hand and said she had something to do.

"You're mean. We came to Japan, but you're going to hang out alone?"

"She said we could pick the rooms on our own..."

* * *

Lee SiWoo glanced at Amy and then began running toward the room in the corner.

"That's mine!"

"What? That's obviously mine! I have to film the best ocean view!"

Amy and Lee SiWoo were fighting for the room, leaving only Shin YuSung and Sumire in the hallway.

"Hmm... Should we hang out?" Shin YuSung asked with a smile, and color returned to Sumire's face.

"Ah, yes!"

That only lasted for a short while before she nervously smiled.

"A-as expected... YuSung... You're too kind."

Sumire knew why Shin YuSung had proposed them going for a walk.

"I... I'm sorry... This should be a happy day, yet my expression was too dark, right?"

"That's okay. After all, everyone has their worries."

Sumire smiled after hearing Shin YuSung's words, but her eyes seemed sadder than usual.

"It's p-probably just a dumb worry from your point of view..."

Sumire smiled bitterly while saying that. Shin YuSung looked at Sumire for a while; then he opened his mouth.

"Rather than just a walk, I think a dinner would be better right now."

Sumire, whose head was lowered, raised it, looked at Shin YuSung, and carefully spoke.

"Th-then... would a f-family restaurant be okay? I've never been to one..."

After saying that, Sumire smiled awkwardly. Shin YuSung smiled back at her.

"Okay."

* * * *

The 1st floor of the Sky Hotel...

EunAh squinted as if she was being blinded, and the bodyguard that was waiting for her gave her a pair of sunglasses.

"Where is she? I heard that mother called me."

EunAh returned to her cold self after she put on the sunglasses—she only showed her true personality in front of her family or YuSung. She was the successor of the Shinsung group, after all.

"The madam is already waiting at the arranged place," the bodyguard answered cordially.

Next to him, there was a familiar Japanese city guard.

'Are they bodyguards my mother called...?'

"I heard it. It's a hotel, right? But why did she choose another hotel?"
Kim EunAh flipped her hair and asked the bodyguard.

"I don't know the details."

Hmm- Kim EunAh stood still while looking at the long limousine. She sighed.

"Well, it's okay~ Mother has always been like that. Let's go!"

As Kim EunAh got in the limousine, she was greeted by a familiar face.

"Ah! You're here, miss!"

"Huh?! Why are you in Japan?!"

"Although it's a bit expensive, I used a portal! Because the madam... gave me a special mission."

After saying that, Lee SuHyun smiled, and his face showed mixed emotions...

"Miss, aren't you sleepy? After all, it will take a while to reach our destination," Lee SuHyun said.

Kim EunAh slowly shook her head.

"Me? Not at all. I'm fine."

Tap!

Lee SuHyun suddenly grabbed Kim EunAh's arm. Surprised, she tried to brush her off, but Lee SuHyun wasn't letting her go.

"Y-you! What are you doing?!"

Kim EunAh's eyes widened in surprise.

"Miss... I'm sorry."

While holding Kim EunAh, Lee SuHyun got close to her and murmured, her voice laced with mana.

"Fall asleep."

"Ugh, y-you!!"

Kim EunAh tried to free herself, but they were in a narrow limousine. She'd relaxed too much.

It was Lee SuHyun's trait—Language Soul.

It was a skill that had lots of restrictions.

She needed to be close to the target, they needed to be surprised, and it had to be used in an enclosed space.

A lot of conditions had to be fulfilled for it, but it was a perfect ambush, so Kim EunAh couldn't do anything against it.

"Why? Just... Why...?"

Her eyes slowly closed, and strength left her arm.

Paf-

In the end, Kim EunAh fell asleep in Lee SuHyun's arms.

She was in charge of EunAh for a very simple reason... Even without doing a dangerous hunter job, she was paid far more than them.

What she was doing was just part of her job, but Lee SuHyun wasn't

feeling good about it.

[Miss! You should say it a bit softer!]

[Softer? But isn't that... t-too embarrassing?]

She remembered how Kim EunAh entered the party and how that ended up changing her.

[You should be feeling cold... Take my coat, at least.]

[Don't worry. It's okay.]

Lee SuHyun had looked at her too much. She even began wondering if having a little sister would feel like that.

'Did I get too affectionate...?'

Even if she told herself that it was all because of the job, she couldn't help but feel heartache while remembering everything EunAh had said.

"Haa..."

She sighed.

Lee SuHyun softly ran her hand through Kim EunAh's hair, who was asleep on her knees.

* * * *

Although there was usually silence in Gaon's student council, a rhythmical sound was heard.

Taptap - taptap-

Unlike usual, Shin HaYoon was tapping on the desk with her index finger. That meant she was feeling good. Lee Hyuk spoke while giving her some documents.

"I went through and finished the list you gave me."

"Well done," HaYoon shortly answered.

After finishing his job, Lee Hyuk glanced at HaYoon's expression. She was making the same relaxed smile as usual, but Lee Hyuk was always next to her, so he could tell the difference.

"It seems like something good happened."

"Ah, something good? Fufu, it's just a prank... a fun prank."

Lee Hyuk's expression hardened when he heard HaYoon's explanation.

'A prank that's fun to HaYun...? I wonder what that could be.'

Even Lee Hyuk couldn't come up with an answer to that.

"Wh-what is it?"

He couldn't handle his curiosity.

"You'll hear about it soon enough," Shin HaYun smiled and told him.

Chapter 102

In the end, Amy won.

Amy's self-defense got her the upper hand. Unexpectedly, Amy was quite good at self-defense. Lee SiWoo tasted the bitter taste of defeat after being pushed into the ground by her.

"Agh, uh... Wh-what strength!"

"Haha! This is what you get for underestimating me!"

"Aah! Okay! I've lost! So please, come down!"

After Lee SiWoo admitted defeat, Amy got up and brushed off her hands. On the other hand, Lee SiWoo got up while holding onto the wall.

"But... you're a reserve member. Is it okay for you to stream?"

"The party leader said it's okay! And come on~ there's no way someone would go missing."

As Amy smiled, Lee SiWoo fell into thought.

"Really? He said I should participate as a reserve member..."

Amy was surprised at Lee SiWoo's words.

"Huh, r-really? But... that makes it sound as if he thinks I'm weaker than you!"

Amy looked at Lee SiWoo and then laughed!

"Of course~ that isn't true at all!"

"Yes, You're great."

It was true that Lee SiWoo had lost against Amy, but that was when talking about the bow. Lee SiWoo had never used a gun in Gaon Academy.

'Although, I'm wondering... '

How far could the shooting abilities his father had recognized take him?

'Well... There's no way I'll be using it.'

While Lee ShiWoo's thoughts were getting deeper, Amy took something from her Pocket and put it in the air.

Swoosh-

It was a small drone that was the size of an eraser. Amy, who was a streamer, greeted her viewers.

"Hey! Everyone, before the competition begins~ I'm going to introduce a new guest! Ta-dah~"

"I am the guest?"

Before he noticed, Lee SiWoo had become Amy's guest.

"Come on, greet the viewers~."

She was even pressuring him. Lee SiWoo nervously spoke while making an awkward expression.

"H-Hi... I'm Lee SiWoo, Amy's party member."

Lee SiWoo was very nervous in front of the camera.

"I... won't be able to use this. Well, I guess there's nothing I can do. Only someone like the party leader can be comfortable in front of the

camera from the beginning~"

"I guess so. YuSung is good at everything, but is streaming important for a hunter?"

Amy's expression hardened after she heard Lee SiWoo's question.

"Ugh. Th-there's no way... Are you underestimating the importance of entertainment?!"

"No, I'm not ignoring it, but..."

* * *

"Ugh... I really hate this... I'll slowly explain things to you, so focus here!"

Amy put the hologram chat window up.

[Yeonsari has donated 5 USD!]

- Is this japan?

[Eimjang has donated 250 USD!]

- Are they preparing for tomorrow?

- Yes.

- Amy is really a goddess...

- But what are they doing?

Lee SiWoo was forced to look at the chat window. Amy began talking again.

"Check this out. Can you see the people waiting? How many are there?"

"Let's see... There are about six thousand people? It's still going up..."

Lee SiWoo scratched his cheeks nervously. He was afraid he was going to make a mistake. It seemed like Amy was really passionate about broadcasting.

"When all these people look at my streams, I have fun! Yes, streaming brings peace back to my mind!"

"It sounds impressive."

Lee SiWoo was starting to understand.

Amy's mood had improved.

"In reality, it's also because of my Trait."

When he thought about it, Lee SiWoo didn't know Amy's Trait. The only thing he knew was that she was in the same class as Kim EunAh, so it should've been an A-ranked Trait.

"You're streaming because of your Trait? What's... your Trait?"

As Lee SiWoo asked her, Amy began scratching the back of her neck. It wasn't clear if she was embarrassed or happy.

"Hehe, that's... T-transformation?"

As Amy smiled awkwardly, Lee SiWoo narrowed his eyes.

"Transformation...? Is it a body-fortifying Trait? But what does that have to do with streaming?"

Lee SiWoo had seen transformation or body-fortifying Traits. There was a wide variety of them, from a simple body-fortifying, buffs, or even transforming into an animal, But he never imagined a Trait like Amy's.

"The... more people look at me, the stronger I become."

After saying that, Amy showed him her Trait.

[Transformation (Trait) - You can increase your physical stats for a determined time. While Transformation is on, the Guardian's Heart will be applied.]

[Guardian's Heart (Skill) - The more people you have to protect, the stronger the effect of Transformation will become.]

To be more precise, she had a Trait that scaled depending on how many people were cheering for her.

"She's a real attention seeker..." SiWoo unconsciously mumbled.

* * * *

Junes Family Restaurant

"Welcome!"

"You can sit anywhere you want."

The employees greeted them as soon as they entered the restaurant. It was a place Sumire always wanted to go to with Shin YuSung. Unlike before, Sumire seemed excited.

"What should we order?"

As Shin YuSung asked briefly, Sumire began looking through the menu.

"Ah, in this shop it seems like steak, pizza, lobster... and tomato spaghetti are delicious! Taking into consideration YuSung's taste... I think that curry will be okay, too."

Sumire's attitude had improved a lot. Shin YuSung sighed in relief and ordered from the menu.

"Enjoy your food!"

As the employee put their plates on the table, Sumire concentrated on how well-decorated the plates were.

"Ah, so in places like this, they decorate the food like this..." Sumire mumbled in surprise while looking at the spaghetti in front of her; then she took a fork, rolled the spaghetti onto it, and put it in her mouth.

Slurp-

From the sauce to the noodles, the spaghetti was perfect.

"It... it's... delicious..."

As Sumire exclaimed in surprise, Shin YuSung took a spoon of curry and tasted it.

Crunch.

"As expected, it isn't that delicious." Shin YuSung, who enjoyed most foods, mumbled while making a calm expression.

"Yes? Th-there's no way..."

Sumire was surprised, but YuSung spoke as if it was obvious.

"As expected... it seems like the curry that Sumire makes is the best."

Sumire subconsciously took a deep breath.

"Y-YuSung... S-something like..."

Sumire tried to hold back the laughter, but she couldn't. The ends of her mouth were going up. After looking at the curry, Shin YuSung spoke.

"It's true. This curry doesn't even have delicious karaage."

He was definitely saying that to make her feel better.

Even if she knew that, Sumire was feeling good about it.

"He, hehe... Th-that's because it's a mushroom curry! It's obvious that it wouldn't have karaage."

Although he'd said that, Shin YuSung was eating curry just as well as usual.

"I'm sorry for making you feel worried..."

Sumire closed her mouth tightly to gather her courage; then she opened it and said what she was thinking.

"I was just thinking... could someone like me, who ran from Japan... deserve to be so happy...?"

And after saying that, she smiled bitterly.

"Because of my Trait, I ended up hurting people... I was even scared to look at their faces... So I just escaped..."

As Sumire scratched her empty spaghetti plate, Shin YuSung spoke in a serious voice.

"So you want to escape again?"

"Th-that..."

Sumire mumbled out the last part of the sentence. Shin YuSung put his spoon down.

"Sumire, I'm here now."

Shin YuSung knew how important it was that someone was next to you when things become hard—his growth and skills were proof of that.

"It doesn't matter what happens. I'll be on your side."

Sumire was very important to Shin YuSung. She was a colleague that was like family to him, so Shin YuSung was serious.

"Getting the courage and starting is something only you can do."

Sumire had to face her biggest trauma: the Japanese students she'd hurt... the party members she'd abandoned without a word.

Even though Sumire could continue running, she nodded.

"I... I'll get the courage... I'm going to get stronger... I want to become a party member that suits Mr. YuSung..."

SWOOSH!!

As Sumire said that, her right hand began shining. That time, what Sumire was after wasn't external but inner strength.

Laplace's strength had reacted to her craving for strength.

"Th-this...?"

Sumire was surprised. Her Pocket was projecting a hologram.

[You've fulfilled the 2nd condition, and synchronization has increased to 5%.]

'This is clearly... '

Sumire remembered what Laplace had said.

[Listen well. The way to awaken the strength of the fragment is...]

She couldn't hear the latter part, but she subconsciously knew what it was. Her desire for strength had awakened the strength of the fragment.

[Current Synchronization Rate: 56%]

Sumire looked at the hologram with a blank expression.

Chapter 103

After completing her tight schedule, Mei Lin returned to Korea.

"Is it here...? She sighed and asked Baek MyungHo.

Tap tap.

Her high heels tapped over the floor as she walked. Baek MyungHo gave her a glance and nodded.

"Ah! Yes! Everything you see before you are the artifacts to be given out as rewards!"

"I see... Ah, I apologize for this, but could you stay a bit away from me?"

Although they were both hunters that had the same 6th rank, Baek MyungHo acted as if she were his superior.

"U-understood!"

Mei Lin found Baek MyungHo's attitude uncomfortable but forced herself to smile. She began checking the list.

"Giant Snake's Scales, Blood Grial, Saint's Watch... Hmm? Where's the Star Coral Stone?"

Baek MyungHo pointed toward a box that was in the corner.

"I changed the artifact according to the Association President's orders from the Star Coral Stone to the sphere inside the box!"

Mei Lin looked at him while making a confused expression.

"The President changed it himself? And... a sphere...?"

"Ah, if you stay here for a moment, I'll bring it to you!"

Baek MyungHo was overly kind to Mei Lin. She nodded.

"Thank you, I'd like to see it briefly."

Baek MyungHo smiled and adjusted his glasses before he scurried over to grab the box and bring it back to her, opening it for her to see its contents.

"Here! It's this artifact!"

As the box opened, Mei Lin was lost for words, but she did her best to return to her senses.

"Haa, ehem! This is clearly an artifact the Association President could give... but did he really say... he's going to give this artifact as a reward?"

"Seeing how surprised you are, it seems like he was right!"

Baek MyungHo reacted proudly to Mei Lin's befuddlement.

"Th-this... isn't something a student can handle... '

The Thousand-Year-Old Jade...

The Fist King, Kang YuChan, the Dark Witch, the Sword God, etc...

It was the reward that a party made of the six strongest had obtained after clearing the 50th floor.

The scary thing about the Thousand-Year-Old Jade was the strength it contained. It was a crystal made after the mana flowing from the dragon god's veins gathered and condensed.

It was a dangerous artifact. If someone who wasn't ready obtained it,

they could be swept away by the strength.

'As expected... is the Association President trying to give this to student Shin YuSung?'

It was excessive.

Not only that, but the Korea vs. Japan match was a three-on-three match, so even if Shin YuSung was strong, there was no guarantee they'd win.

'It's hard to understand what he's thinking... '

As a hunter, Mei Lin had become interested in Shin YuSung, who'd shown great potential as the Fist King's disciple. What would happen if he absorbed the Thousand-Year-Old Jade?

Wouldn't he be able to reach a higher floor of the Tower that humanity hadn't yet gone to?

"Does anyone else know that the reward was changed...?" Mei Lin calmly asked.

MyunGo touched his glasses in a nervous manner.

"It... it's just me and Ms. Mei Lin!"

"Ah, yes... Okay. Until tomorrow... I hope you maintain this as a secret."

Nod.

"Understood!"

Leaving Baek MyungHo behind, Mei Lin walked out. MyungHo finally sighed in relief and made a satisfied smile.

"I'm... glad I became a hunter."

Was it because of the humidity? Baek MyungHo's glasses were covered in steam. He took them off and began wiping them with a special glasses cleaner.

[Wingless... Academy Town's Fairy ★]

—A glasses cleaner that had something weird written on it.

"To think I'd be able to see Ms. Mei Lin's face..." MyungHo happily mumbled to himself.

He was an honorary member of Mei Lin's fan club.

* * *

Her mind was still hazy because she still hadn't fully woken up.

Rubbing her eyes, Kim EunAh looked around. She saw a bed that she hadn't seen before.

'This is... '

Someone next to EunAh said something.

"Did you wake up...?"

It was Lee SuHyun's voice.

EunAh suddenly remembered what had happened. *Fwoosh-* She moved back and glared at Lee SuHyun.

"You-!"

EunAh's voice was filled with anger.

SuHyun had expected such a reaction from her.

"Miss, shouting when you were just asleep is a bad habit. You should

still be tired, so lay down on the bed."

"Why...? Why did you?"

As Kim EunAh looked at her in confusion, SuHyun spoke while making a serious expression.

"The madam has ordered me not to let you leave this room."

"WHY?!!" Kim EunAh shouted in an annoyed voice.

SuHyun slowly walked toward her.

"Miss, think about it. Why... do you think the madam ordered this?"

As SuHyun walked toward her, EunAh slowly moved back.

Tap.

As if there were a transparent wall behind EunAh, she couldn't retreat anymore.

"What's this? I can't leave the bed..."

SuHyun was right in front of her.

"This is the strength of my Trait, Language Soul. I placed a lot of restrictions on you while you were asleep."

Kim EunAh tried to push her, but as she touched SuHyun's body, she couldn't put any strength in her arms.

"My body's weird..."

Not only that, but she couldn't use her electricity either.

"Miss... I'll ask again. Why do you think the madam has done such a thing?"

Lee SuHyun's voice spread throughout the enclosed space. EunAh shook her head.

"I don't know... That's what I'm trying to figure out. Why are you doing this to me...?"

SuHyun looked at EunAh with sharp eyes.

"You need to figure that out because that's the weight of your privilege."

SuHyun leaned in close to EunAh and held up three of her fingers.

"I've placed three restrictions on you." Lee SuHyun said while folding her fingers.

One-

"Do not leave the bed."

Two-

"Don't attack me."

Three-

"Don't use your Trait."

Lee SuHyun lay EunAh on the bed by force.

"Ugh! You! You... what the...?"

Kim EunAh was so surprised that she even hiccupped.

SuHyun covered EunAh with a bed sheet.

"You could catch a cold, so I should add another Language Soul."

"Are you crazy! No! Don't do that!"

She couldn't do anything against SuHyun, who was a rank 6 hunter.

"Don't leave the blanket."

Lee SuHyun's voice spread through the room, and SuHyun gave EunAh a cold look.

"My Language Soul becomes stronger in an enclosed space. Even if you try to win, you'll just pointlessly waste your mental power"

The sight of Kim EunAh covered with a blanket was funny.

"What's going on...? Why are you doing this...?"

EunAh glared at SuHyun, but it was useless—SuHyun ignored her.

"If it were up to me, I'd put you to sleep again, but I cannot do that since I cannot use a Language Soul that I've already used again..."

Ah! It seemed like SuHyun had thought of something. She sat on the chair and spoke in a soft voice.

"Then... should I tell you a fun story until you fall asleep?"

"Leave me alone..."

EunAh was already exhausted from trying to escape from the Language Soul's bindings. Lee SuHyun smiled bitterly.

"I'm sorry, I had no other choice..."

After calming herself down as much as possible, EunAh spoke to SuHyun.

"I'm not sure what you and my mother are after... but I must participate in the International Competition tomorrow."

"We know that."

"What?"

"Now that I think about it... I almost forgot about something."

Lee SuHyun leaned in close to EunAh and began manipulating her Pocket.

"I'm sorry, but I'll be borrowing the miss's hands."

Lee SuHyun grabbed Kim EunAh's hands and began pressing on the hologram. Shin YuSung's name appeared on it.

"It's his name, not a nickname. I'm glad. I'll say this again... Miss, you cannot leave this room."

"You..."

SuHyun grabbed EunAh's hands again and began writing a message; then she sent it.

[KimSilverA: YuSung... I'm sorry, but I don't think I'll be able to participate. Something happened in my family. I'm sorry.]

Kim EunAh's expression hardened at the unexpected development of events. SuHyun got up from the chair and looked at her.

"Isn't the way of writing identical...?"

"I really can't understand... Why are you doing this...?" EunAh asked while looking at SuHyun, who avoided looking at her.

"I've spent a lot of time next to you, so I already know..."

The SuHyun Kim EunAh was looking at wasn't her usual self.

"Miss, you wouldn't listen to what the madam has to say... That's why they made me do this."

Treating someone with whom you used to talk and laugh with was really hard to do, so SuHyun bit her lips and quickly left the room.

'EunAh, I'm sorry... '

Lee SuHyun was regretting having become affectionate with her. She thought that was a mistake for both of them.

'I don't have a choice.'

SuHyun closed the door.

She heard EunAh's voice from the other side of it, but SuHyun did her best to ignore her.

Chapter 104

EunAh's sudden message...

[KimSilverA: YuSung... I'm sorry, but I don't think I'll be able to participate. Something happened in my family. I'm sorry.]

It was a situation that could surprise anyone, but surprisingly, Shin YuSung was quite calm.

'There's nothing I can do... '

He'd considered the possibility but never thought it would actually happen.

The good thing was that Shin YuSung had prepared backups.

'The ones that are left are... Amy and SiWoo.'

Kim EunAh was the second strongest, so her not being able to participate was a huge loss, but he had to make a choice.

'If I need to pick between Amy and SiWoo, right now, it's SiWoo.'

Between them, anyone would think that Amy had a higher chance of winning, but Shin YuSung chose Lee SiWoo.

It wasn't that Shin YuSung realized Lee SiWoo's true skills.

Before entering Gaon, SiWoo had received a lot of gun training.

There were very few people who knew about his real skills.

That wasn't what Shin YuSung had realized.

[Swoosh! Paf!]

What Shin YuSung found weird was Lee SiWoo's shooting at first—there was a lot of strength in his shoulders, and his posture was too straight.

Although his posture made him look like a novice, how he managed his breath was too smooth.

Just taking into consideration how he breathed, it was even comparable to Shin YuSung, who'd trained on the Martial Spirits' Mountain for 12 years.

[10 points! Let's go!]

Decisively, although his posture was bad, he was surprisingly good at aiming. Lee SiWoo was clearly hiding something from Shin YuSung.

That was why Shin YuSung had chosen him even though he was like an unopened box.

'I'm not sure why SiWoo is hiding his strength, but he's currently stronger than Amy... '

Even if Lee SiWoo lost, he was sure of that. After making a decision, Shin YuSung sighed.

'Sumire and SiWoo are the people I chose... '

Shin YuSung smiled while looking at his Pocket. He was the one who said that trusting your party was important, after all.

"I'll have to trust them."

After making up his mind, Shin YuSung clenched his fists.

* * * *

Time went on.

There was a plate of rice porridge in the room.

In the end, because she was worried, Lee SuHyun entered the room and looked at Kim EunAh.

"Miss...?"

Even if Lee SuHyun called her, Kim EunAh sat silently on the bed. Lee SuHyun gripped the plate and spoke.

"The Language Soul's source is mana. You tried to resist it, so you're probably tired... Eat some easy-to-digest porridge at least."

As Lee SuHyun gave it to her, Kim EunAh closed her mouth.

"I don't want to..."

"Miss, please. At least a spoon..."

"There's... no need to ask me, right? Force me to eat with that great Trait of yours."

Kim EunAh's eyes seemed tired because she'd tried to resist Lee SuHyun, who was a rank 6 hunter for the entire day. It was impossible to do with Kim EunAh's physical ability.

Even if Kim EunAh was a numbered of Gaon, the opponent was an active rank 6 hunter—she wasn't someone Kim EunAh could face.

"Miss, please."

"I don't want to..."

Kim EunAh's voice sounded exhausted.

Kim EunAh realized that resisting was futile. EunAh's blank expression suddenly changed.

"I... know why mom is trying to do this."

Her voice filled with a bit of anger.

Kim EunAh tried to calm down and then spoke.

"It's because oppa... became like that. She's afraid, right?"

Lee SuHyun bit her lips.

She couldn't get herself to reply to Kim EunAh's trembling voice.

"Miss..."

* * *

"I understand. Yes, she's probably worried. What will she do if I suddenly can't get up from bed? I understand it, but..."

Kim EunAh began crying while glaring at Lee SuHyun.

"You shouldn't have done this..."

She was trying her best to hold back the tears.

Lee SuHyun knew that Kim EunAh cried easily. She knew that, on the days she went to see Kim JunHyuk, she put her head on the pillow and cried while trying to make as little noise as possible.

"But... you've seen it all."

Tears dripped from Kim EunAh's eyes. She wasn't sobbing because she felt betrayed. Lee SuHyun began feeling weak when she saw her like that, but that only lasted for a brief while. SuHyun clenched her teeth.

"Miss... I had no other choice."

Lee SuHyun calmly said, leaving emotions aside.

"Miss, you will become the heir of the Shinsung Group... The more

power the crown brings you, the heavier it will become."

Lee SuHyun wasn't planning to let Kim EunAh go.

"Miss, you're the person who's going to wear the heaviest crown. A hunter... can always be replaced, but one cannot replace the heir of the Shinsung Group."

After Lee SuHyun finished talking, Kim EunAh lowered her head.

"Who said that... I want to wear something like that? Do you think that I'll give up on the party... That I'll give up on becoming a hunter because of something like this?"

"Miss..."

Kim EunAh spoke in a low voice that SuHyun could barely hear.

"You saw it all... How YuSung saved my oppa... How I sent a message to him..."

Kim EunAh kept mumbling.

"I finally decided to get close to him..."

Every time Kim EunAh talked, Lee SuHyun couldn't help but feel remorse.

"I finally decided to stay in YuSung's party..."

Because of what happened to Kim JunHyuk, Kim EunAh had been afraid of opening her heart to others.

Lee SuHyun turned her head away, but Kim EunAh didn't stop talking.

"You know that I invited him... to the ball. That I met him at the festival... You're worse than my mother."

Kim EunAh slowly raised her head.

As expected, Kim EunAh cried too easily.

"Kim EunAh, don't force things..."

SuHyun forcibly tried to look angry, but EunAh glared at her and shouted.



"Don't call my name-!"

Lee SuHyun couldn't even imagine how betrayed EunAh must have felt. Unlike her, who was an adult, Kim EunAh was just 17 years old.

Lee SuHyun often thought it might be how having a little sister would feel.

'She probably trusted me more than I do... '

SuHyun had betrayed her.

"Traitor..." EunAh said, frowning.

It seemed like even getting angry was too hard for Kim EunAh at that point.

"I really trusted you a lot... I thought that, sniff- We'd become really close..."

Lee SuHyun failed to control her expression. She grabbed her forehead, and her head hurt as she closed her eyes.

All the things they'd gone through passed through her mind.

[Woah...]

[Look at this!]

Them sending the message together...

[I... I could make a mistake... Why did you kick me?]

[I'm tired of repeating myself!]

Them watching the stream together...

[Ah, yes! I got a bit fatter! Stop touching me! Is my stomach clay?! Why are you touching it so much?!]

[Sit down. I'm going to put on the blue dress!]

Them picking clothes together.

'Ah, this is going to make me crazy... '

SuHyun lifted her hands from her forehead.

She would be lying if she said she didn't have fun during the time she'd spent with Kim EunAh.

She sighed and got on top of EunAh's bed.

"Hey, eat..."

EunAh shook her head.

SuHyun forced her to grab the spoon and forced her to eat.

"Ugh! Ub!"

"Stop complaining and eat... Tomorrow, I'll go with you to talk to your mother."

As Lee SuHyun lifted her hands from the spoon, EunAh flinched in surprise.

SuHyun gave her an annoyed look.

"Are you going to eat or not...? Should I throw it away?"

"No. I... I'll eat it..."

After grabbing the spoon, Kim EunAh took a glimpse at Lee SuHyun.

"Tomorrow is the tournament... Won't speaking tomorrow be... too late?"

Kim EunAh's eyes were red as she asked that question. SuHyun frowned.

"You're being greedy again. There's no way you'll be able to

participate in such a state. Do you just want to stay here?"

"N-no. That's not it..."

Kim EunAh took a spoon of porridge while trying to avoid looking at Lee SuHyun.

SuHyun looked as if she'd given up.

"Hey, your mother is going to fire me tomorrow, so I'll talk to you comfortably. You don't have any complaints, right?"

"Ah. Y-yes!"

Kim EunAh nodded.

SuHyun sighed.

'How did I get involved with such a stubborn kid...?'

SuHyun's emotions had been bounced around too much by mother and daughter.

Chapter 105

Within the hallway of the sky hotel, Lee SiWoo gulped and was nervously dripping sweat.

YuSung smiled and spoke, "Then, I'll be counting on you, SiWoo."

Lee SiWoo mirrored YuSung's bright smile.

"Huh, yes. YuSung... But is that really okay? To be honest, compared to EunAh, I'm..."

"It's okay, you just have to do your best..."

Lee SiWoo scratched his head while making a nervous expression.

"R-right? I'll have to do my best. After all, it's a huge opportunity..."

Even while saying that, SiWoo felt that something wasn't right. Shin YuSung spoke in a calm voice while looking at him.

"Thank you. SiWoo, let's do our best."

With that, YuSung left to go somewhere else.

Nod.

Although he was nodding, Lee SiWoo was still nervously sweating.

'To think that I'd really... participate in the International Competition... '

Would he be able to win with his half-assessed mindset? As Lee SiWoo fell into thought, his expression became serious.

'Can I win with the arrow...?'

For Lee SiWoo, using a gun was like accepting his father's and his family's way of teaching. Just thinking about that made him feel unpleasant.

When he held a gun, he felt his mind grow colder. He felt he became more aware of everything happening around him; he could even feel his own heartbeat.

Lee SiWoo hated everything related to that.

If he went to the International Competition, he would have to feel that in front of the whole world.

'I... '

Lee SiWoo's father had forced him to run with a gun at just 10 years of age. He said it was to train his breath.

His body froze in the cold numerous times.

There was no way he'd be able to shoot in the middle of extreme cold and breathe correctly.

'I never asked them to teach me something like shooting... Damn it.'

Using a gun in the International Competition would be like submitting to his family in front of the whole world.

[See? This is all because I recognized your talent!]

Every time Lee SiWoo remembered his father's authoritative way of speaking, he couldn't help but clench his teeth.

'Damn it... '

Within the charnel house, a place where the remains of the deceased were kept, Seiji rubbed his nose while looking at a box with a paper crane and flowers.

"Long time no see, Ryuko!"

There was no reply.

Seiji thought it was good that there wasn't anyone else at the charnel house. He sat on a chair and looked at the box.

"As expected, you won't reply today, either~"

Seiji lowered his head while making a playful gesture.

"You used to say that ghosts were real~ but in reality, they don't exist, right?"

Seiji sighed and then smiled brightly again.

"Maybe that's better. You would get tired of me if you could hear my words."

Seiji smiled kindly, as usual, while looking at the box.

"After all~ It's already been five years."

Seiji cleaned his nose again and looked at the picture behind the glass. A girl with short hair was smiling confidently while clenching her fists.

Minakawa Ryuko...

Seiji's only childhood friend. Her life had been cut short in the summer when she was 12 years old.

"How weird... Maybe ghosts do exist? I feel like I can hear something."

Within the silent charnel house, Seiji focused on what he was hearing.

He thought about what Ryuko always used to say. Just by thinking about that, he felt like he could really hear her voice.

[...an!... ry!]

A sunny summer day...

A very familiar voice coming from within a hideout deep within the mountains.

[You're a man! Don't cry!]

He'd met Ryuko for the first time when he was five.

They became friends just because they lived close to each other. After that, Seiji spent seven years hanging out with Ryuko.

[Hey! Let's go training!]

[Me? Okay, but... Ryuko, I'm afraid of the mountains.]

He was a lot smaller back then.

When Seiji was 12, his body seemed even weaker than Ryuko's.

[Scared? Haa, to think that you'd cry from a test of courage! You're a man, so stop crying all the time!]

Ryuko clenched her fists and punched the air while shouting.

[A hunter is all about ambition! Your mental strength is very important! You need the courage to not be afraid, even when a monster appears!]

Seiji looked at Ryuko talking while making an impressed expression.

[As expected. You're cool, Ryuko... I also want to become brave like you.]

[Me? You can also become like me if you become braver! That's why you should stop crying all the time. Okay?]

As Ryuko patted his back, Seiji nodded and smiled.

[Yes! Okay! Ryuko!]

Unlike his timid self, Ryuko was the complete opposite of him. Seiji really admired her.

Not only that, but Ryuko was also strong.

At 12 years old, she wasn't pushed back by middle-school students when she was still in elementary school. Not only that, but she had a huge talent for becoming a hunter. She could face a rank 1 or even a rank 2 monster.

[Ryuko! You're cool!]

Seiji was really proud of his friend. He didn't care about other people, but he at least wanted to look good in front of her.

She was probably his first love.

[I'm going to become Japan's strongest hunter! After that, the world's strongest!]

Ryuko always used to smile confidently while talking about her dreams, but Seiji's dream was Ryuko. He wanted to stay next to her until she became a shining star. He'd sworn since he was little that he would stay with her.

[Ryuko, you'll be able to do it!]

Unfortunately, the world was a cruel place and held no mercy, even for 12-year-old kids.

[Becoming... the world's strongest might be too hard for me...]

It was an unknown disease.

The Ryuko that had been shining until a few days before greeted Seiji in the hospital. Her eyes had lost their brightness in just a few days.

[Seiji. They said that I don't have much time left. If I want to live... they need a stone called a... circulation stone? I think.]

[Ryuko...?]

The star had fallen.

Someone who used to shine had lost her light. The only thing a kid could do in such a situation was cry.

Seiji screamed and told Ryuko not to die.

[I... I'll... buy it for you! Ryuko! Th-that's why, please... d-don't die!]

[Stupid... Not even adults can buy it. It's something that costs as much as 100 houses...]

Seiji got angry at Ryuko's parents, who were just crying. He also became angry at his powerless self, but no matter how angry he was, the only thing that he could do was cry.

[You're a man... don't cry...]

And the next day...

Seiji saw Ryuko crying for the first time.

He used to be afraid of the mountain, even when he climbed it with her, but Seiji climbed the mountain alone that day. The only things in front of him were the night sky and light.

There were numerous stars in the sky, but Seiji's star had fallen.

The day Ryuko died, Seiji also died.

The only thing left was the dream.

Pat!

Silence reigned in the charnel house.

Seiji got up and smiled brightly, just like the bright smile he used to show when he was a kid.

"As expected, I can't hear anything!"

He began laughing alone.

After making up his mind, Seiji turned around and made a promise to his childhood friend.

"Ryuko! I'll come back after becoming the world's strongest!"



Seiji's goal was to win the International Competition. His first opponent was favored to win the competition...

Korea.

Chapter 106

After the incident...

Kim EunAh and Lee SuHyun, the two of them, were sitting on the bed with their backs touching each other.

EunAh had recovered some of her energy after eating the porridge. SuHyun sat next to her, wearing pajamas as well, and sighed.

"Haa..."

Lee SuHyun narrowed her eyes and took a glimpse at EunAh.

"Hey, you know that, if we go and see your mother tomorrow, I'll immediately be fired, right? You should be thankful to me."

"Hmph, traitor..." Kim EunAh mumbled in a low voice.

She didn't seem angry, but she seemed annoyed. SuHyun shook her head.

"She ordered me. What could I have done? Do you know how scary your family is?"

EunAh clicked her tongue at SuHyun's words and turned her head away. SuHyun was feeling troubled.

'I've lost my mind. To think that I'd think of going against the madam... '

Kim YunHa, Kim EunAh's mother, after Kim SukHan, was the strongest among the Shinsung Group. Although SuHyun was a rank 6 hunter, going against Kim YunHa's orders was too burdensome.

Even amidst such a situation, SuHyun was worrying about EunAh.

"Your body's going to hurt tomorrow, so you should try to sleep."

"Whose fault is that...?" Kim EunAh complained in a low voice. Then she narrowed her eyes.

"Tomorrow... you're really taking me to mom, right?"

"Yes. I'll just accept my fate and take you there."

Lee SuHyun sighed after hearing EunAh's question.

"Haa... But why do you want to become a hunter? You're from a jaebol household, after all."

"Because I want to."

That was EunAh's simple answer.

Then it was EunAh's turn to ask a question.

"Then why did you quit being a hunter? I heard you used to be quite successful."

"That's... Haa, do you really want to hear why?"

SuHyun, who seemed like she was about to say something, grabbed her forehead as if it hurt.

"No matter what, being a hunter..."

SuHyun suddenly remembered what YunHa had told her—becoming a hunter was too dangerous for her daughter.

Lee SuHyun, who was a rank 6 hunter, agreed with that.

"A day when something sad happens will inevitably come."

Lee SuHyun's bitter voice was serious.

"I just wasn't able to handle that."

To become a rank 6 hunter, Lee SuHyun had gone through many battles. Among them, she'd had to sacrifice a lot to succeed in raiding a dungeon or the Tower.

A small mistake could put everyone's life in danger.

Lee SuHyun really hated a lifestyle like that. Living a comfortable life working for the Shinsung Group was much better.

Kim EunAh fell into thought while patting the orca doll that was on top of her legs. After thinking for a while, she opened her mouth.

"Is that why you did that...?"

At Kim EunAh's question, Lee SuHyun remained silent for a while. She only opened her mouth after organizing her thoughts.

"Yes. You won't be able to handle it."

Lee SuHyun looked through her memories. Although Kim EunAh acted cold on the outside, she was quite a warm person in reality.

You could easily see that when she went to the hospital to see Kim JunHyun. She'd cried next to him for the entire day.

"It isn't that you aren't brave. Being a hunter is a really cruel job."

Lee SuHyun had a pained expression on her face.

"You'll eventually have to make a decision and say to yourself that it was the best one..."

Although she hadn't said it, Lee SuHyun was remembering something.

"Depending on the result, a situation when you must sacrifice a

partner might come."

Lee SuHyun knew that the EunAh she knew wouldn't be able to make that decision. Maybe her soft personality might bring an even greater danger.

"You don't know the position in which you're in. You aren't someone who can handle such danger."

Lee SuHyun wasn't talking as an employee of the Shinsung Group but as EunAh's onni.

"You can do something more worthwhile than becoming a hunter."

Swish-

While talking, Lee SuHyun's emotions became heated. She turned her head to Kim EunAh.

"Why not..."

EunAh had fallen asleep while resting her head on SuHyun's shoulders, and her face looked more innocent than anyone else's when she slept. SuHyun sighed.

'Well... I guess it's understandable for you to be tired... '

Kim EunAh had received Lee SuHyun's Trait up front. That should've consumed a lot of her mana. As SuHyun tried to move away...

EunAh's eyebrows scrunched.

"Ungh..."

In the end, SuHyun couldn't move at all, but she wasn't feeling annoyed.

'She's cute in situations like this... '

Was it because she'd used a lot of mana?

Watching Kim EunAh sleep made her sleepy too. On top of that, the sound of Kim EunAh's breath sounded like a lullaby.

'I... Should lay on the bed and sleep properly... '

Although she was thinking that, SuHyun's eyes were closing. Soon, while leaning on each other, they both fell asleep.

* * *



The giant stadium that more than 70 thousand people could enter was full of people.

[Hood-blooded boy! Seiji! Fighting!]

[Sakura, you're the best!]

[Isshin, show your samurai mentality!]

[This is our home ground!]

There weren't many people shouting, but many placards were hanging. As the Japanese team entered the field, the people began clapping.

When Shin YuSung and the Korean team entered, they clapped but not as loudly.

Yokohama was the Japan team's home ground, after all. Besides some people clapping in respect, there weren't many people cheering for them.

- Hi! I'm Yuki, the one in charge of presenting this International Competition!

-... I'm rank 6 hunter Shoichi!

The presenter was smiling brightly, and the commentator had a blank expression on his face. Those two were some of the most famous people in Japan.

Shoichi was a rank 6 hunter who'd worked in Korea with the nickname Shim Ahn. His abilities were widely known worldwide.

- This Korea-Japan match is gathering the attention of the world since it's the first match of the International Competition!

Yuki began presenting in a bright voice. As the camera zoomed in on her, she smiled.

- Commentator Shoichi, before starting, what do you think is most important?

- I think that it's the formations... Because it's one-on-one duels in

three matches, the party leader must get the victory for his team.

As Shoichi finished giving his explanation, Yuki nodded while making a huge gesture.

- Then we will start by checking the list of matches! The party leaders gave the list of participants a day ago! The rules are really fair and just! Should we check the details?

[Korea: 1st round - Shin YuSung]

[Japan: 1st round - Kuroki Seichi]

As the matches were presented, Shoichi frowned as if he didn't like the result.

On the other hand, Yuki shouted while making a surprised expression.

- Ah! The 1st round is going to be a match between party leaders! It seems like they've chosen their strongest members to be able to bring victory!

Yuki was right.

To lift the atmosphere, Korea sent Shin YuSung, and Japan sent Seiji.

Both party leaders had decided to participate in the 1st round.

"Hmm! A fight between party leaders! This is making me nervous!"

Although he said that, Seiji was smiling.

Sakura sighed.

"You should've listened to me and avoided Shin YuSung. You could've easily won a point if it were someone else."

"Trust me. I'll do my best."

"You idiot. It isn't about doing your best but getting the point~"

While Sakura was talking with Seiji, Yuki announced the matches of the 2nd round.

- So~ I'm going to announce the matches of the 2nd round! Ta-dah!

[Korea: 2nd round - Lee SiWoo]

[Japan: 2nd round - Hanasaki Sakura]

Sakura smiled in surprise while looking at the screen.

"Eh? What~ Him? That isn't Sumire or Kim EunAh!"

Sakura looked at the other side in surprise. She saw Lee SiWoo's face.

"He's..."

It seemed like something had come to her mind. Seiji just laughed.

"Then, is Kim EunAh in the 3rd round?"

"Well, I guess that's expected. There's a weird atmosphere here, too..."
Sakura said to Isshin.

There was nothing weird with Sumire not participating and Kim EunAh being in the 3rd round. As 2nd in the Gaon ranking, Kim EunAh's abilities were very widely known.

[Korea: 3rd round- Hanajima Sumire]

[Japan: 3rd round - Kirishima Isshin]

Nobody expected that.

Isshin couldn't help but frown while looking at the screen.

Chapter 107

When the matches were fully announced through the screen, Yuki continued to explain.

"The portal will lead to a virtual space! So you don't need to hold back. Use all of your strength!"

Yuki smiled.

"The map lottery will be one of the places that represent Japan~ So then, everyone, send your cheers to the participants!"

The audience began cheering.

Seiji felt his heart beat fast. There were countless people in the audience that were cheering for him. With a smile on his face, he extended his hand toward Shin YuSung.

"Let's do our best!"

YuSung smiled and shook Seiji's hand.

As the two party leaders shook hands, the audience began clapping, and the portal activated.

BZZT!!

As their fight drew near, YuSung's atmosphere turned serious.

"The 1st round... '

Since Kim EunAh couldn't participate, Shin YuSung had to win, no matter what.

'All Japanese team members have an S-rank Trait. Not only that, but I couldn't check the last Trait.'

Thanks to the power of the fragment Sumire had obtained, she'd become a lot stronger, but she didn't have much fighting experience, so knowing the outcome beforehand was hard.

Shin YuSung reassured himself while looking at the portal.

'I'm going to win, no matter what.'

* * * *

[- Silvermoon City -]

Shin YuSung looked at the hologram that appeared in the Pocket. There was a moon shining with a silver light over the city.

'It seems like this map is fixed at night... '

Silver Moon city was a virtual city full of giant towers and was one of the virtual places prepared for the International Competition. The moonlight shone over his head.

'I guess it's better for me?'

He wasn't sure how the opponent would react, so Shin YuSung calmly began looking at his surroundings and raised his senses to try to find Seiji.

'I'll have to be careful of shadowy places.'

It was the same theory behind why SuHyun, who could control water, was strong in a swimming pool. In a place with shadows, one could create a shadow that attacked.

On their map, it was nighttime.

Instead of a sun, the moon was illuminating the map. Because of that,

one couldn't see the shadows.

Tap, tap.

Shin YuSung hid his presence and began walking through the night city to find Seiji.

* * * *

Kim EunAh was biting her lips in nervousness, sitting in a long limousine.

"Ugh..."

"You tried to act strong, don't tell me you're nervous..."

As Lee SuHyun sighed and spoke while making a worried face, Kim EunAh replied.

"Shut up..."

Kim EunAh's mother, Kim YunHa, was staying in Japan, so Kim EunAh got into a limousine to go and find her.

Lee SuHyun decided to give EunAh a chance, but she thought that convincing YunHa would be impossible.

"Do you really think you'd be able to convince the madam in such a state? Can you really do it?"

Since YunHa felt how dangerous a hunter's life was through Kim JunHyuk, she wouldn't stay still and let Kim EunAh do as she pleased.

"Now that I think about it, I'm surprised the madam let you do as you wanted until now. Realistically speaking, it wouldn't be weird if your brother suddenly collapsed again. You know that."

"Be careful with what you say..."

EunAh's voice had a chilling tone, but that didn't stop SuHyun from giving her a piece of advice.

"That's why you need to stay focused!"

Lee SuHyun shouted so loudly that the bodyguards flinched. She raised her voice while looking at EunAh.

"If there's something that you want to protect, say it confidently and be honest! Nothing will be solved if you just keep shaking in fear, okay?!"

EunAh nodded at Lee SuHyun.

"Okay..."

"You're right. Now... No, I already knew how important your new party is to you."

She knew that EunAh's personality had changed thanks to the party. She was having fun and was starting to take things seriously.

SuHyun saw that all. That's why she'd decided to go against YunHa's orders for EunAh's sake.

"Explain everything... After all, the madam doesn't know how important your party and the hunter job are to you."

As Lee SuHyun finished talking, the limousine reached a certain building.

Shinsung Group's Japanese branch...

It was the place that Kim YunHa personally managed. Just standing there was enough to make EunAh nervous, but that was only for a brief while.

EunAh made up her mind.

"Good, okay... Let's go see mom."

* * *

A city without a sun...

While standing in the middle of Silvermoon City, Seiji stood with his arms crossed and shouted loudly.

"Haha! To think that it would be at night. That was totally unexpected! It's daytime outside of the portal."

It was as if he knew where YuSung was despite him having hidden his presence. Shin YuSung began analyzing Seiji from a distance.

'The opponent seems to want a frontal fight... but he isn't moving from a determined place.'

Why would he be doing that?

Seiji's Trait was shadow-related, and the reason was definitely related to that, but Seiji had chosen a park that was surrounded by four towers. Considering what one could see, it was an open field.

It wasn't a good place for ambushing an opponent.

Tap tap.

Shin YuSung confidently stood in front of Seiji, who was smiling brightly.

"I'm sorry! I'm late because I was making preparations."

Shin YuSung didn't know how Seiji made shadows. The only thing he could do was sharpen his senses.

Pat!

Shin YuSung attacked first.

He leaped forward. It was so fast that a normal hunter wouldn't have been able to react.

Swoosh!

YuSung's fist got stuck in Seiji's head.

BOOM!

Seiji's head exploded and scattered away.

Rather than blood and flesh, there was just a hazy fog.

"Type 1 Shadow Bind!"

As Seiji made a seal and smiled, his shadow rose from the ground in a tentacle-like shape. It was a shadow Seiji had made through mana. It wasn't that strong.

Paf!

As the tentacles tried to surround him, Shin YuSung easily cast them aside with a simple movement and retreated backward.

Pat!

Seeing YuSung's reaction, Seiji swung his arm while smiling.

"That's it!"

With Seiji's signal, a huge amount of light began illuminating the park.

Shine!

The light was an installation-type flash that Seiji had prepared beforehand and put in his pocket for situations like that.

It was installed at the top of the tower, but he hadn't installed just

one. Some others were illuminating smaller buildings.

The installation-type flashes were some sort of hunter artifacts that Seiji had prepared. The intense light was creating shadows through varied angles.

"Type 5! Lunar Eclipse!"

Seiji's eyes widened as if he'd been waiting for that moment. Thanks to the multi-angled flashes, a fog-type shadow began pouring toward Shin YuSung.



Fwoosh!

The mass made from mana was added to the fog created through the Lunar Eclipse—it had the capability to destroy everything it touched.

As the giant shadow wave approached him, Shin YuSung smiled.

"It was a good plan."

‘Battle God Style 4th Form, Black Dragon's Body Armor.’

Tss!!

The black energy that rose from Shin YuSung's body began devouring the Lunar Eclipse's shadow.

The thickness of the mana was on an entirely different level. It was Shin YuSung's overwhelming strength.

"This... "

Seiji's best attack was devoured too easily. Seiji clenched his teeth, but he did not intend to give up.

"Type 4 Invisible"

After turning into a shadow, Seiji rushed forward at lightning-like speed with a dagger in his hands.

Pat!

"This is my best chance!"

It was a chance he'd created through careful planning. It was the only chance he would get.

Chapter 108

Seiji clenched his teeth.

He'd already confirmed how strong Shin YuSung was. That's why he had banked everything on defeating him with one attack and used the buildings to create a shadow for his Type 5 Lunar Eclipse.

Then he used Type 4, Invisible, which increased the effectiveness of his attack.

'If I stab him with this dagger...! The barrier will crumble! Victory is in my hands!'

Seiji's speed was incredible thanks to the effect of 'Invisible'.

Although he felt his body was scattering away like dust, Seiji didn't slow down.

Even still, a max speed was a max speed.

Even if Seiji gave his all, it still felt too slow to YuSung.

'I can see it.'

Thanks to his [Heightened Focus] Trait, Shin YuSung felt like time had stopped.

'He's targeting my heart.'

Since he'd figured out the trajectory of the attack, dodging it wasn't hard.

Even if the dagger was close to him, Shin YuSung's speed after using Black Dragon's Body Armor wasn't comparable.

'Putting my left foot forward... '

To Shin YuSung, Seiji's attack didn't present any danger.

Pat!

WHOOM-!

As Shin YuSung twisted his body slightly and dodged Seiji's attack, the dagger swished through the air.

'Ah-!'

He felt chills on his back.

The moment he realized his attack had failed, Seiji backed up.

Paf!

WHOOM-!

His animal-like instinct was right since Shin YuSung had immediately extended his hand.

'I must dodge that!'

Before Seiji's foot touched the ground, he moved his head.

Pang!!

The mana wave from YuSung's outstretched hand brushed past Seiji.

"Ugh!"

The attack just brushing by him was enough to make him feel dizzy, but he'd avoided being hit by it, so he didn't receive any physical damage.

'Did he miss? With this, I finally got another... '

Seiji was about to make his next move when he heard a loud sound behind him.

BOOM-!

One of the buildings was crumbling.

Seiji finally understood.

'He didn't miss... '

YuSung had targeted that building from the beginning.

He was trying to erase the shadow coming from the building.

Seiji used more mana, and the shadow rose from the ground.

"Type 1 Shadow Bind!"

The shadows moved toward Shin YuSung, but after the building collapsed, their strength decreased.

Seiji's shadows were erased before they could even reach YuSung.

There was an overwhelming difference between them.

When he got a grasp of the situation, YuSung was already in front of him.

'This is Korea's representative... '

The difference in strength was on a whole other dimension.

He was someone he wouldn't be able to beat, no matter how much he tried, but still, he didn't intend to give up.

'If I manage to land this attack...! If I can dodge this attack...!'

Seiji tried to turn his body into a shadow and hide. If he managed to do that, he'd be able to avoid any physical damage.

"Seiji, this is the end."

YuSung already expected that. His mana-covered hand hit Seiji's chest.

Pat.

Battle God Style Savage Dragon's Boulder Crushing Palm.

Paf!

A dull thump echoed out, and a huge wave spread through his chest.

* * *



The impact of Savage Dragon's Boulder Crushing Palm spreading from Seiji's back destroyed the surroundings.

BOOM!!

As if someone had flipped a light switch, everything went dark. Seiji felt like the whole world had been dragged to a point.

'Ah... '

He felt as if he were laying in space.

Since he'd lost, he would soon be kicked out of the virtual space and back to reality.

'So I lost... '

Seiji didn't even feel angry. He couldn't help but admit that the opponent was too strong.

'If it were Ryuko... Would she have been able to do it?'

As he thought that, he couldn't help but laugh.

[I'll become Japan's strongest hunter! And then... I'll become the world's strongest!]

Seiji's star had died, but another star was rising.

He'd wanted to join the rising stars, but a star without a dream of its own was destined to fall to the burden of the weight it carried.

'Ryuko, I'm sorry... '

Up until then, Seiji had never taken a break. Thanks to his Trait and skills, he'd managed to enter Choten, and just like the school's name indicated, he'd reached the peak of all 1st-year students.

He'd defeated all sorts of enemies to reach his current place, but in the end, he fell as well.

'As expected... '

Seiji's dream was but a dream he'd inherited from someone else. If he

was fake, Shin YuSung was real. He really dreamt of becoming the strongest.

—Just like Ryuko.

'I... '

He felt like he was sinking endlessly into the water. All of the stars had fallen, and Seiji was being kicked out into reality.

It was time to wake up from the dream.

* * * *

Yokohama Stadium's competitor waiting room...

Seiji apologized to his teammates while making a playful expression.

"I'm sorry! I lost!"

No one from the Japanese team blamed Seiji.

Sakura was making a bitter expression, and Isshin was blankly staring elsewhere.

"Seiji... Are you okay?" Sakura asked with a worried tone.

Seiji covered his eyes with his hands and smiled as usual.

"Yes... I'm okay!"

The only thing Sakura could see was that Seiji was smiling.

"I... I just have to become... stronger... next time!"

Unlike his voice that was trying to remain calm, tears were dripping to the floor.

Five years had passed, and Seiji followed Ryuko's dream and became Japan's strongest.

'Ryuko... '

At that moment, he felt like the same person he was at 12 years old. If Ryuko saw him, she would for sure say something.

[You're a man! Don't cry!]

Seiji missed that nagging.

* * * *

It was an overwhelming victory.

Shin YuSung had won against Gaon's former ranked 1st, Adela, so Seiji wasn't a match for him.

He confidently returned.

"YuSung!"

"YuSung!"

Sumire greeted him with a smile, and Lee SiWoo lifted both thumbs.

"How could you beat an S-rank Trait so easily? You were really cool! I knew you'd win!"

"To think that you'd beat Kuroki so easily... As expected, you're amazing!"

Sumire had come from Japan, so she'd heard rumors about Seiji. He'd used his S-rank shadow-controlling Trait to become Japan's strongest in just a year.

That was the effort Seiji made for Ryuko, but despite that, Seiji soundly lost to YuSung.

"It's now your turn, SiWoo. Good luck!"

Shin YuSung smiled as if he already knew everything. SiWoo laughed while feeling guilty.

"O-okay! Believe in me!"

Although he'd said that, Lee SiWoo had fallen into thought.

'Can I beat one of the Seven Stars of Choten with just my bow skills?'

Japan's Hanasaki Sakura...

Lee SiWoo had learned archery, so he was well aware of her. After hunter's equipment appeared, bows became an unpopular weapon.

Among the countless types of equipment, Sakura only used a bow. Even if they left her Trait aside, Sakura's ability with the bow was overwhelming.

'What if I use a gun...?'

Tap, tap.

Lee SiWoo walked toward the stage that held the portal atop it.

WAAHH-!!

The audience began cheering.

'My father and my family... They're all probably watching... '

SiWoo couldn't help but frown after thinking about his father.

Tap, tap.

He stood before his portal, trying to cast aside the uncomfortable feeling.

"You..."

Sakura, who was standing next to him, spoke to him while scrunching her eyebrows.

"You came to Japan before, right?"

Although Sakura said that, she didn't seem completely sure. It was as if she were trying to complete a puzzle.

"Haha, no. I think that you're mistaken."

Siwoo smiled, but Sakura frowned.

"No, you came... You came to my dojo with the city guard's chancellor..."

Sakura's voice went cold as if she'd remembered something.

"I'm not sure~ I don't remember."

As Lee SiWoo kept smiling, Sakura turned her face to him and looked him in the eyes.

"Maybe you've forgotten it... but I'd never forget something like that."

Sakura's expression was different from her usual smiling self.

Then, finally, SiWoo's tone went cold.

"I don't know. I'm not interested in whatever situation you're in."

After saying that, he clicked his tongue. There was a strong sense of nervousness from the start of the match, but Yuki, who didn't know what was going on between the two, was presenting with a smile on her face.

"Then... Korea-Japan! The 2nd round of the International Competition will begin!"

Chapter 109

Round 2 was about to start.

Sumire fell into thought while looking at Lee SiWoo.

'If Lee SiWoo wins this match... '

The rules of the competition were three matches, and two wins.

If he won, Sumire wouldn't need to go on to the 3rd round, and she wouldn't need to face Isshin.

Thinking about 'that incident' with Isshin made her hands tremble. She forced herself to clench her fists.

'I... '

Sumire looked at Shin YuSung. If the opponent wasn't Japan, Sumire wanted to show YuSung how strong she'd become, but the idea of fighting Isshin frightened her.

Sumire had stopped going to school and left Japan—she'd ended up hurting Isshin and her party members.

That's why Sumire was so scared of Isshin's eyes, and that was why she wanted to avoid fighting them if she could, but every time such cowardly thoughts appeared, she looked back at herself.

'Am I... really suited to be YuSung's party member?'

Grab.

Sumire bit her lips and lowered her head. She wasn't going to hesitate.

'Even if I'm not... '

Sumire raised her head confidently and looked at the screen.

'I'm going to change... I'm going to become worthy of joining YuSung's party... '

Sumire couldn't think of a life without YuSung.

The time she'd spent with him meant everything to her, so she only had one choice from the beginning.

* * * *

[- Echo Forest -]

As soon as he saw the map's name in the hologram, Lee SiWoo quickly hid.

'The place of the battle is a forest...?'

A forest had clear advantages and disadvantages for a shooter.

It was quite good that there were many places where you could hide, but the number of trees, rocks, and the irregular surface made it hard to aim.

'Well, this kind of forest is easy for me.'

Northern territories that featured extremely cold weather, humid tropical jungles, extremely hot deserts...

He'd experienced all sorts of terrains due to his father's training.

'I must drag my opponent to a place where I have the advantage.'

As Lee SiWoo held his breath and used Clairvoyance, he could see everything up close as if he were using a magnifier.

'I can't see any traces of her... '

Still, all he could see with Clairvoyance were surfaces within his view.

'In cases like this, I have no other choice.'

Lee SiWoo looked around, picked a place, and calculated the distance. He'd picked a place with many fallen tree branches.

'If it's a place in a corner like that, I'm sure she'll be tempted to scout the location.'

After finishing his thoughts, Lee SiWoo took something from his Pocket.

'Let's see. The ground is dirt, and it's a forest. In that case, it'll be number three... '

He picked a small speaker with the number '3' written on it. He hung the speaker onto an arrow and shot it toward the place he'd seen before.

Swish! Paf!

The arrow hit the grass, and the speaker began to emit the natural sound of steps.

Tap, tap.

Not only that, but it wasn't just a simple repeating sound of steps. The sounds of moving through the grass and stopping as if he were hiding were also heard.

Slide.

He heard the sound of someone carefully sliding through leaves. A smile crept onto SiWoo's face.

'Idiot. To think that she'd fall for this... '

SiWoo aimed toward an empty spot in the grass. Soon, Sakura, who was hiding in the grass, came out. It seemed like she was looking for the source of the sound.

Lee SiWoo aimed more carefully.

'A little bit more... '

They were really close, but Sakura couldn't find Lee SiWoo due to how he'd hidden his presence. Lee SiWoos's arrow was pointing toward Sakura, and he was holding his breath.

'Come a bit closer... one more step.'

Slide.

The moment came.

Sakura saw the speaker, and her eyes widened. At that moment...

'It's the end!'

SiWoo loosed the arrow.

Pang-! Swish!!

* * *

It lacked a bit of strength because of his posture, but it was precisely aimed toward Sakura's head.

"Ugh! You-!"

She tried to use the strength of the wind to block the arrow.

Whir-!

Since she'd activated her Trait quickly, it didn't display much strength.

Crash-!

The only thing she was able to do was to slow down the arrow.

Sakura's barrier broke, and holographic fragments poured in all directions.

[You've destroyed 79% of the barrier.]

[Remaining barrier: 21%]

SiWoo narrowed his eyes while looking at the hologram.

'So I couldn't end it with one attack.'

"A bow...?" Sakura mumbled while she watched Lee SiWoo's escape.

It was strange, there was no way he would use a bow and arrow...

'Especially you... '

Lee SiWoo didn't remember, but for Sakura, it was an unforgettable memory.

'You...?'

Sakura's confused expression soon filled with anger. She clenched her teeth.

'You were the ones... who laughed about archery... '

It had been seven years, but she still remembered it.

Korea's city guard chancellor, Lee SungHwan...

If she thought about it, that was the moment the dojo started to decline.

[Is it this place?]

His face didn't show any expression.

As Lee SungHwan looked at the dojo with a cold expression, Okinawa's chief of police pointed toward the dojo.

[Yes. This is a place with a long history. It's the only place in Okinawa that serves to train the city guard in archery...]

After looking at the Korean chancellor and Okinawa's chief, Sakura's father came out while wearing his hakama.

[Chief! Why did you suddenly...]

[You see...]

The atmosphere suddenly became awkward.

Lee SungHwan didn't seem to care about Sakura's dad.

[As expected, the bow is an antiquated weapon. It would be better if we stopped training in archery.]

[What do you mean so suddenly?!]

As Sakura's dad complained, Lee SungHwan frowned and answered.

[I said that the bow is an antiquated weapon. That's why this dojo should cease to be a training location for the city guard.]

More than 70% of the dojo's membership was composed of Okinawa city guards. If they all suddenly left, Sakura's dojo would struggle to remain open.

Lee SungHwan didn't seem to care about that.

[How many years would it take for someone to be able to fight a monster in a real-life situation with training from this dojo?]

The chief seemed to hesitate but ended up answering.

[To use it in a real-life battle... it takes someone between three to four years.]

[The city guards aren't being trained to become martial artists. They're training to become stronger in order to protect the people.]

Lee SungHwan sighed.

[Nowadays, there's hunter equipment all over the place... so is there a need for someone to spend three years training in a rusty dojo like this?]

Plaf-

Sakura, who was only 10 years old back then, couldn't handle it anymore. She ran toward Lee SungHwan while still carrying her backpack.

[Don't make fun of archery!]

[Sakura!]

Sakura's dad shouted, but that day, she didn't stop.

[You can definitely become strong with the bow and with archery!]

Lee SungHwan laughed at Sakura's words and then spoke to the chief.

[I'll show you how easy it is to use hunter equipment.]

Lee SungHwan looked at the target field and called someone over.

[SiWoo, bring the gun.]

Sakura then finally looked at the target field. There was a boy she'd never seen before standing there.

He was smaller than her and holding a gun that had been specifically made for his size.

The boy gripped his handgun and shot it a few times while standing there.

Tang, tang, tang, tang!!

Blue light shot out with very controlled movement. The bullets blew the target away.

It had an overwhelming destructive capability and precision.

Sakura looked at the boy while making a surprised expression; that was also the case for Okinawa's chief.

[Th-that's...]

Lee SungHwan was once again making a sly smile. Sakura's father was at a loss for words.

[If it's a gun with the strength of a mana stone behind it... even a kid can pull the trigger and easily eliminate monsters.]

From the moment bullets were shot, the winner was decided.

[A month is enough time to teach someone to shoot a gun. Not only that but, depending on the type of gun, you can use it for diverse strategies.]

Sakura's dad couldn't help but remain silent at the explanation. It was a complete defeat.

Lee SungHwan spoke loudly on purpose.

[Is there a need for us city guards to be so obsessed with old traditions...?]

As Lee SungHwan finished talking, the chief made a troubled

expression at Sakura's dad.

[That's what happened... I'm sorry, but from now on, we won't be sending people here anymore...]

That was like a death sentence to Sakura's dojo.

[Dad...?]

Even if Sakura desperately called for him, her dad, who used to be always so confident, was looking at the target while making a blank expression. It was a memory that Sakura couldn't forget. She gripped her bow tighter as she remembered that.

"You made fun of archery! Of my dad...! Why would you use a bow?!"

Just like the name of the forest, Sakura's shout became an echo and spread through the forest.

"Are you making fun of me?!"

Lee SiWoo's arrow went flying toward the angry Sakura.

Swoosh.

WHOOM!

As Sakura swung her hands, the arrow stuck to the ground.

Paf!

"So that's the limit...?"

Sakura quickly returned to her senses and aimed toward where the arrow had come from. *FWOOSH*- Wind began gathering around the arrow.

With the thought of blowing up the entire forest...

BOOM!

Sakura let go of the string.



Chapter 110

Pang!!!

Sakura's arrow flew across the forest.

Crack!

The arrow with the strength of the wind behind it tore everything apart in its wake. Lee SiWoo was somehow able to dodge it.

BOOM!

"Cough!"

After falling to the ground, he crawled and hid as quickly as possible. He heard the air whooshing in the distance.

'How could an attack like that...?'

Lee SiWoo's attack had damaged the barrier, but Sakura's attack was on another level.

It could destroy his barrier if it even touched it slightly; he would immediately be disqualified.

'If I retreat, it will be okay... I'll have another opportunity... '

While SiWoo was hiding his presence, he heard a familiar sound coming from where Sakura was standing.

PANG-!!

Sakura's second arrow.

Crack-!!

Lee SiWoo turned his body at the chilling sound approaching him.

BOOM-!

The arrow swept away everything next to SiWoo. Broken pieces of wood and dirt scattered away in all directions.

Lee SiWoo's F-rank Clairvoyance was helpful in long-range attacking, but Sakura's S-rank Trait was incomparably more powerful.

It increased the destructive power of her arrows and also enabled her to create a barrier.

Even her skills were extremely good.

'The only good thing is the line of sight it creates... '

Lee SiWoo fell into thought as he frowned.

Sakura's attacks swept away the forest and cleared up the view. For SiWoo, who had Clairvoyance, that was quite helpful.

Grab!

The problem was speed and precision.

SiWoo fell into thought as he ran across the forest.

'My arrows aren't faster or stronger than hers... '

Sakura had practiced archery her whole life, and her Trait was S-rank, so trying to fight her under the same circumstances was suicidal.

'If I used a gun instead of a bow... '

—Then he had a chance.

The thought of grabbing a gun still made him hesitate.

'Damn it... '

Due to his inhuman training, giving up wasn't an option for him. His father believed that all of SiWoo's achievements were thanks to him.

To Lee SiWoo, his father was the worst.

'Grabbing a gun... is like admitting that my father was right.'

Tap.

SiWoo was standing behind a tree, hiding his presence, and Sakura was clenching her teeth while trying to contain her anger. She began walking in SiWoo's direction.

"Answer me... Are you making fun of me?"

Sakura's anger-filled voice seemed to have a tinge of sadness in it for some reason. She was angry because he was using a bow instead of a gun.

Sakura was proud of archery, but if Lee SiWoo didn't use a gun, it was as if he were saying he wouldn't fight with everything he had.

"You piece of trash... You were the ones that laughed about how old and rusty archery is..."

Sakura's voice trembled.

It was then that Lee SiWoo began remembering something from the past.

[Don't make fun of archery!]

[You can become strong with a bow and archery!]

'She's the girl from that time... '

Sakura continued to talk as she slowly advanced.

"My... My father..."

Her voice sounded strained.

Sakura suddenly stopped in place. Before entering Choten Academy, she'd become angry with him and run out of her house.

She had felt that way after he decided to close the dojo that contained all their childhood memories.

She just felt angry.

* * *

As time went on, Sakura realized something...

Instead of her dad giving up on the dojo and smiling softly, she wanted him to shout proudly again.

Archery wasn't rusty; her father wasn't wrong.

She didn't want her dad to give up.

"Archery... is my pride."

Sakura glared in SiWoo's direction. She had gone to the dojo since she was a kid, so Sakura knew how serious her dad was about archery.

"He isn't someone you guys can make fun of..."

When Sakura picked up the bow, he always talked to her about her mindset, so there was no way she didn't know.

"Use your gun," Sakura said in a firm voice.

SiWoo, who was listening to her from behind the tree, slowly walked

out.

They looked at each other. The sun had passed overhead, and its light was filtering through the treetops. SiWoo's silver gun shone in the sunlight.

SiWoo looked at Sakura with cold eyes. It was a strange sensation. Just by grabbing that thing made of steel, his head became calm, and his heartbeat normalized.

What were the chances of him winning against Sakura? After thinking about it for a while, he smiled as he looked at his gun.

'It might be worth trying.'

Tap, tap.

Lee SiWoo lightly waved his handgun.

"Is this what you want?"

Sakura frowned after looking at it. She hadn't misunderstood.

'As expected, he's... '

He was the son of Lee SungHwan—the person who'd made fun of archery in her father's dojo. No matter what, Sakura couldn't lose against Lee SiWoo.

Lee SiWoo's thoughts were different.

"You know what?"

Tap.

SiWoo dropped the gun.

Paf!

The pistol thudded into the dirt.

Lee SiWoo spoke while looking into Sakura's eyes.

"I don't want to do as you please."

It was a provocation Sakura wasn't expecting.

Sakura looked at him with a stunned face, and her expression soon turned aggressive.

"You-!"

Sakura aimed at Lee SiWoo.

"You...! Are you going to make fun of us and archery until the end?!"

At Sakura's angry voice, a slow smile crept onto SiWoo's mouth, and he replied.

"Hmm, I'm not sure...? Unlike you, who is proud of the bow, I do not hold such thoughts towards the gun."

Lee SiWoo looked at Sakura with cold eyes.

"Maybe you were happy using your bow, but every second I held a gun was like hell to me. I'll never use something that hurts me like that again," Lee SiWoo said firmly and then laughed mockingly toward Sakura.

"How about you shoot me while I'm weaponless with your 'great' bow?"

Sakura couldn't handle her anger at the provocation and rushed toward SiWoo.

"You-!"

Sakura grabbed SiWoo's collar and kicked him onto the ground.

BOOM!

Lee SiWoo fell right next to the handgun. Sakura pointed at him with her finger and spoke.

"Grab the gun..."

Whish!



Wind began gathering on Sakura's finger, but still, Lee SiWoo was relaxed.

"I don't want to."

Based on what he'd seen, SiWoo knew that Sakura wouldn't be able to hit him in his state.

It was ironic that being weaponless was so safe. Sakura stood over SiWoo, grabbed his collar, and raised his head.

"Grab the gun-!"

Sakura's eyes had a strong killing intent, but even though she was grabbing his collar, SiWoo seemed relaxed.

"How about this...?"

He made a proposal, a smile beginning to show on his face.

"Don't use your Trait."

Sakura's expression distorted.

"What...?"

"You heard me. Don't use your Trait."

Tap.

SiWoo pushed aside Sakura's hand and continued speaking.

"Let's make it a pure shooting competition with no Trait involved."

He let his smile fully show.

"If we do it like that, I'll use my gun. Didn't you want to see who's stronger?"

SiWoo, whose eyes had completely changed, kept provoking Sakura.

"Don't tell me that you wanted to beat me with your S-rank Trait and say that archery had beaten a gun?"

It was a provocation Sakura couldn't refuse.

Chapter 111

The stadium's waiting room was silent.

YuSung fell into thought as he looked at SiWoo.

'His atmosphere changed.'

SiWoo threw the gun aside and pressured Sakura. He wasn't sure about the details, but there was no way Sakura would refuse SiWoo's proposal.

Everything happened after SiWoo pulled out his gun.

'As expected, SiWoo's main weapon wasn't the bow.'

YuSung already knew it because, compared to how good his breathing and concentration were, Lee SiWoo's skills in archery were terrible.

That meant that, before using the bow, he used another weapon.

Leaving whatever situation had happened before aside, SiWoo held his handgun that YuSung hadn't seen him use before in front of him.

YuSung thought making SiWoo his party member was the correct decision.

'ShiWoo's strength... isn't solely in his Trait.'

Just like YuSung, SiWoo's strength had been polished and improved through training.

Through fighting and experience, one could fortify their Trait, and if your mana increased, you could become a hunter different from the others.

'That's probably also the case for the Japan team's Sakura.'

Not only had Sakura trained her trait, but she'd also practiced archery throughout her entire life. Sakura's archery was, without a doubt, perfect.

Unlike YuSung, who was analyzing their strength, Sumire was more interested in SiWoo and Sakura's relationship.

"I wonder what the relationship between them is..." Sumire wondered.

YuSung just smiled.

"I'm not sure..."

YuSung couldn't even guess what the connection between them was.

"But there is one thing I'm sure about..."

Sakura's shaking eyes told him what she was going to say.

"Sakura's going to accept SiWoo's proposal..."

Up until that point, YuSung's guesses had never been incorrect.

* * * *

In a corner of Echo Forest...

"You..."

Sakura glared at Lee SiWoo, a frown on her face.

His demeanor completely contrasted Sakura's. Even if the winner of the match was on the line, SiWoo seemed calm.

"If I do use my gun, it won't be because of you. It'll be to achieve victory for my party, okay?"

Lee SiWoo smirked, and Sakura just clenched her teeth.

'He's probably watching... '

* * *

The International Competition was transmitted all around the world. Her dad was definitely looking at her from somewhere.

The archery she'd polished and practiced since she was little... Sakura wanted to show her skills and have the confidence to say to him that he wasn't wrong.

To do that, she had to accept SiWoo's proposal. She couldn't prove anything by defeating a weaponless opponent—it meant nothing.

"Do you think I'll accept such a proposal...?"

Sakura's voice had gone cold.

SiWoo shrugged.

"I'm not sure. I know that, even if I use my gun, I will lose if you use your Trait. I don't want to use it in a fight where I already know I'll lose. I also have my reasons."

SiWoo picked up the pistol that had fallen to the ground and began brushing the dirt off of it.

"Answer quickly. If you say you won't use your Trait, I'll take my gun and move away; then I'll fight with you."

SiWoo skilfully spun the handgun in the air and then said, "Well, if you don't like my proposal, shoot me. Of course... You'll never be able to take revenge for what happened in the dojo."

Lee SiWoo's words went directly to the point.

After thinking about it for a while, Sakura opened her mouth.

"Okay... I won't use my Trait, so fight with everything you have."

"Alright, let's make it a battle of shooting abilities."

SiWoo smiled.

A one-on-one duel between shooters was always 20 steps. Just like cowboys, both began taking step after step away from each other.

'She really accepted my proposal.'

SiWoo thought to propose such a thing because he'd remembered Sakura's expression in the dojo.

Back then, Sakura came running while carrying her schoolbag, saying not to make fun of archery. Although Lee SiWoo was still a kid, he was still surprised.

'Whether it's a gunpowder weapon or archery, how can she be so serious?'

To SiWoo, the gun was associated with all sorts of painful memories. He had nothing like the pride Sakura had regarding archery.

'To think that she'd accept a proposal like this just because of pride... '

It didn't matter how much he thought about it, she was dumber than dumb.

Still, SiWoo didn't feel good for some reason. He felt strangely frustrated even though he couldn't agree with the emotions Sakura felt in the dojo that day.

What would happen if Sakura lost against him?

What would happen if his bullet pierced her?

Would she cry?

Would she give up on the bow?

Would she start hating archery?

How would her father greet her?

With every step he took, his thoughts deepened.

'Don't think about that. I'm YuSung's party member, and victory here depends upon the pull of the trigger.'

Lee SiWoo had been trained to an extreme in using guns. If he had a gun, he was confident he'd be able to shoot accurately regardless of the terrain.

Even so, it was the first time he felt so guilty.

SiWoo didn't feel good about the thought of destroying the archery Sakura appreciated so much with a pull of his trigger.

'It seems like we're similar... No, to be more precise, we're the complete opposite.'

SiWoo hated his authoritarian father more than anyone. Every time he held a gun, he couldn't help but remember his painful past.

He didn't remember a single time he was proud of the weapon.

Sakura respected her father more than anyone, and she was proud of archery.

Ironically, they were too similar and yet too different at the same time.

19 steps...

20 steps...

Subconsciously, SiWoo took one more step.

Considering SiWoo's shooting skills, it was an unbelievable mistake.

"Ah!"

After making a short exclamation, Lee SiWoo quickly turned around. Sakura had already completed her twenty steps and was aiming at him.

He was surprised only for a brief moment. Lee SiWoo quickly got into position. He would've won the round if he hadn't made such a mistake.



Was it that he hadn't practiced for too long? SiWoo's finger hesitated for a brief moment on the trigger.

[Don't make fun of archery!]

They'd only met once when they were kids.

[You can become strong with a bow and archery!]

SiWoo clenched his teeth.

Him hesitating with a gun wasn't something that should've happened. SiWoo was sure that there was something wrong with him...

But he wasn't able to pull the trigger.

He was upset about his situation and fell into a half-hearted dilemma.

Against Sakura, who'd devoted herself entirely to archery and lived for it...

'Ugh... '

Lee SiWoo couldn't pull the trigger.

Paf-!

Her arrow penetrated his skull. His sight became blurry, and his barrier evaporated.

[The barrier has been destroyed.]

[Remaining barrier 0%.]

The last thing he saw was the hologram's message. Although he'd lost despite being better at shooting, he wasn't dissatisfied with the result.

Even though he had the skill to beat Sakura, he didn't deserve to win. It was just the result of that.

'Damn it... '

Lee SiWoo fell and scattered away into light.

Chapter 112

WAAH-!

The audience was cheering for the Japan team's victory.

"Student Sakura won the 2nd round!"

As the presenter, Yuki, shouted with the microphone, the claps became louder.

Swoosh!

"You... why didn't you shoot me?" Sakura asked Lee SiWoo as they walked out of the portal.

SiWoo blankly stared at the audience and said, "I'm not sure. It seems like my skills were rusty."

To be more precise, it was because he hesitated.

His father had given him trauma through harsh training. On the other hand, Sakura admired her father more than anyone.

SiWoo didn't want to step on such feelings with half-hearted beliefs. He would have regretted it forever.

'I was planning on winning... '

Looking at his trembling hands, SiWoo frowned. He felt that he'd betrayed Shin YuSung by losing.

'I don't have the right to remain in the party.'

Lee SiWoo made up his mind.

'I'll quit the bow... '

Lee SiWoo had seen how serious Sakura was regarding archery. On the other hand, he'd only used archery to escape from guns. There was no way he'd be a match for her.

'Well, I wanted to become friends with her... but it seems like it will only become baggage.'

While SiWoo was organizing his thoughts, Sakura received the microphone from Yuki.

The presenter began interviewing Sakura with a smile on her face.

"Student Sakura, you won the 2nd round and put both countries on equal grounds! Do you have a driving inspiration for your strength?"

Yuki made exaggerated gestures as she talked.

Someone crossed her mind, and Sakura opened her mouth.

"I learned and trained my archery... Under the best teacher."

Sakura stared at a middle-aged man that looked nothing like her as she spoke, but SiWoo could guess who he was based on how strong he looked.

'Is that her dad...?'

SiWoo sighed while looking at Sakura.

He'd caused trouble to his party with his half-hearted beliefs.

That thought was troubling Lee SiWoo.

'How should I tell YuSung?'

Considering how much he cared for his party members, he would definitely try to stop him, but SiWoo had already made up his mind.

Secretary and rank 6 hunter, Lee SuHyun.

Shinsung Group's heir, Kim EunAh.

The Japanese branch fell into confusion at the sudden appearance of them both.

'Wh-why is the miss here?'

'Is... isn't that secretary from the main branch?'

It was understandable that the workers of the company would be trembling. Although Kim EunAh was only a student, she wasn't someone that could be taken lightly.

After all, the chairman of the Shinsung Group was above her.

Everyone knew that the iron-blooded businesswoman's weakness was her daughter.

"I can go up to the 5th floor, right?"

As Kim EunAh and her bodyguards stood before the desk, the female worker began sweating.

"Th-that... You need to contact them before..."

As the female worker hesitated, Kim EunAh frowned.

"You don't know me? I said that I'm here to meet my mom, yet you won't let me?"

Kim EunAh was too confident.

If it were someone else, they would've called the city guard. The worker looked at her superior with tears in her eyes.

"What should I do?!"

One could easily know what she wanted to say by looking at her expression. Her superior soon made a decision.

"W-we'll guide you to the 5th floor!"

Japan branch's workers began guiding EunAh while making a fuss.

Lee SuHyun shook her head while clicking her tongue as they rode the elevator.

"How bad are the rumors about you that even the workers of this branch are trembling in fear?"

"What did I do?"

It seemed like Kim EunAh hadn't noticed that the workers were trembling in fear of her.

"Once your mother fires me, don't be mean to the next person that replaces me."

SuHyun was finally casually telling Kim EunAh what she was doing wrong. Kim EunAh snorted and, ignoring the bodyguards outside the office, she opened the door.

Clack!

There, behind a clean black desk with two city guards protecting her, sat a beautiful woman that seemed to be in her mid-twenties.

[Shinsung Group Japanese Business Administrator]

[President - Kim YunHa]

She would've felt a lot of pressure if she were a normal person, but Kim EunAh placed her hands on the table and confidently shouted, "Why did you do that to me?!"

On the other hand, Kim YunHa coldly looked at her.



"EunAh, why are you here?"

Kim YunHa's words made Lee SuHyun feel chills down her spine. YunHa's authority also had a huge influence on hunters; she was even a scary person to Lee SuHyun.

"Secretary Lee SuHyun, why is EunAh here?"

At YunHa's question, SuHyun held both hands together and bowed.

"I'm sorry..."

"I knew you were soft-hearted, but to think that you'd deal with things like this. I'm very disappointed."

Even though YunHa wasn't a hunter, SuHyun was completely overwhelmed by her energy. It was the power of authority. Kim EunAh frowned.

"Mom, why are you getting angry at her? You know how important the International Competition is!"

"I know. That's why I did this. The more important it is, the angrier your partners will be for messing up the tournament."

Kim YunHa sounded confident and still had her fingers crossed as she sat behind the desk.

"EunAh, do you want to become a hunter?"

It was an unexpected question.

EunAh looked at her in disbelief and opened her mouth.

"Obviously! That's why I w—"

"Why?"

Kim YunHa cut her reply off.

"That's..."

EunAh stopped talking.

For some reason, she couldn't easily come up with an answer.

"Do you really have a reason to become a hunter...?"

The atmosphere had gone cold.

YunHa's pressure stopped EunAh's protests.

"EunAh, I know you very well. You're not interested in things like money and fame. You don't have a spirit of sacrifice."

YunHa got up and looked down on Kim EunAh.

"You'll just bother other people with such half-hearted feelings."

It was a harsh criticism.

EunAh pursed her lips to stop them from quivering. Kim YunHa looked into Kim EunAh's eyes.

"Didn't you feel anything after looking at your oppa? It's ok right now while you're just going to school... but what if you get hurt?"

Even EunAh was scared of YunHa when she exerted such an atmosphere. Kim YunHa smiled brightly at EunAh, who was dripping cold sweat.

"EunAh, that's just bothering others. No one in Gaon can be responsible for that. No one wants you to get hurt. After all, you're destined to wear the crown..."

Kim YunHa placed her hands on Kim EunAh's shoulders.

"It doesn't matter how much talent you have—you cannot become a hunter. I won't allow it... I wonder what your father will think about this. Will he take your side?"

There was a high chance that Kim SukHan would take Kim YunHa's side because he didn't want Kim EunAh to get hurt.

"N-no... I... I also have a goal!"

As Kim EunAh shook her head, YunHa softly touched her hair.

"Yes, mother already knows it. You're talking about playing house, right?"

YunHa's tone was still business-like.

"EunAh... That's the goal of student Shin YuSung. That isn't your goal."

Although she'd just listened to Kim YunHa's words, her body stiffened. She felt like YunHa was seeing right through her.

"If it's that you like your party members, that's okay. It doesn't matter how much money it takes, I'll make sure to leave them next to you."

"N, no. That's not it..."

Kim EunAh wanted to refuse, but everything Kim YunHa said was right. She couldn't deny anything.

"I..."

What was her goal?

If she thought about it, she'd joined the party because of Shin YuSung. Trying to win the International Competition and climbing the Tower were all his goals as well.

What EunAh wanted to do was just to stay in the party. Kim YunHa's analysis was accurate.

"EunAh, everyone has something that suits them. Even if you try to act strong, mother knows the truth," she said in a softly murmuring voice.

EunAh's legs started to tremble. She felt angry at herself for not being able to say anything.

Kim YunHa kept applying the pressure.

"You're a sensible and weak kid who gets easily hurt—just like a greenhouse plant... Could you withstand what hunters need to go through?"

As Kim EunAh began trembling, YunHa smiled.

"You'd probably break... Wouldn't it be better if you left the party before you got even more broken?"

EunAh kept her mouth closed. It seemed like she was about to start crying at any moment.

'Miss...!'

SuHyun was silently cheering for Kim EunAh. She was the only one who knew how much she liked the party members and how serious she was about becoming a hunter. Kim EunAh clenched her fists to gather courage.

Chapter 113

The result of the International Competition was still 1:1.

The final match would decide the pride of both Korea and Japan.

As the participant in the 3rd round, Sumire ended up holding everything on her shoulders.

'K-Korea's win in the International Competition depends on me.'

Sumire gulped.

The responsibility was too heavy. It was a huge loss that Kim EunAh wasn't able to participate.

On top of that, Japanese representative was Isshin, someone who was involved in 'that incident.'

Then, to make things even worse, the competition was formatted into one-on-one matches.

There was too much riding on Sumire's shoulders.

"Sumire, I'm sorry... I've placed too heavy of a burden on you."

SiWoo seemed very depressed, which made Sumire remember something.

[No, Sumire. Thanks to you, the plan's execution was quickened... That's why your role in this tournament is so huge.]

No matter what the situation was, YuSung cheered for her. Sumire smiled at SiWoo.

"It's okay...! SiWoo, you don't need to be so sad..."

Sumire had definitely changed. Even in a situation where she should be feeling extremely anxious, she was quite calm.

"I... I can't trust myself... because I think that I'm dumb and clumsy..."

Although she couldn't see him at the moment, Sumire was definitely thinking of Yusung.

"YuSung trusts me... so I can also trust myself!"

She smiled brightly. She wasn't confident without any foundation.

If she thought she wanted to win for YuSung, Laplace's strength began swelling.

Swoosh.

Purple light began leaking from her hands as if it were waiting for that moment.

Laplace's strength was awakened by the desire to become stronger; when her desire to become stronger intensified, she could use that strength.

And at that moment, Sumire wanted to become stronger for YuSung more than ever.

"I don't think that I'll lose. I'll win, no matter what."

Sumire was displaying a strong will. YuSung felt a bit weird when he saw her with such a different attitude.

"Sumire..."

Sumire was completely different from when he'd first met her.

Back then, she showed low confidence and fear.

Sumire's emotions had been trodden upon by all sorts of things. It was similar to how he felt wounded when his parents abandoned him at five years old.

YuSung had extended his hand toward Sumire. Just like his teacher had done with him, he'd seen the potential in her.

Thanks to that, Sumire's strength rode on YuSung's confidence in her.

"I want to become a party member that complements you, YuSung..."

Sumire smiled.

YuSung also smiled.

"Sumire, I believe in you. I don't think you're going to lose."

As long as YuSung believed in her, Sumire could also believe in herself. She could do anything.

If she were alone, she would've definitely given up, but at that moment, it felt like nothing.

"I'll... be back...!"

Sumire looked as serious as she possibly could.

* * * *

Mei Lin watched the matches through the screen on the wall with a cool expression, but unlike her calm outer appearance, she was falling apart inside.

"It's the final round..."

The International Competition was already a big stage, but the reward that time was an artifact from the Tower—the Thousand-Year-Old

Jade.

It was a treasure that could evolve your body and mana a few times over if you just absorbed it.

'The Thousand-Year-Old Jade's strength is hard to absorb without a strong body... The only students that should be able to handle it are Shin YuSung or Liú Jùn... '

From Mei Lin's perspective, Sumire had to win the round at all costs. If she didn't, the reward from the 50th floor would be wasted.

'She has to win... '

Mei Lin crossed her legs while sitting on the chair, but all of the worry in the world wouldn't change the outcome—the match had already started. All she could do was watch and wait.

* * * *

Japan team's waiting room...

Seiji cheered for him Isshin as he stood up.

"Good luck, Isshin! Even though I lost as your party leader..."

Although he'd said that, Seiji was smiling. Sakura, whose mood had improved, had returned to her normal self.

"Well~ His personality is trash, but Isshin is strong."

Seiji nodded and raised his index finger to make everyone focus.

"Still, we should be careful! Sumire's a necromancer, which is rare among hunters. Not only that, but she has an artifact."

"I can't even think of what she's gonna do..."

Sakura agreed, and Seiji smiled bitterly.

"To think you'd have to fight an ex-party member... I'm sorry for giving you such a burden."

Sumire was Isshin's former party member. Not only that, but they used to study in the same class. She was also involved in 'that incident', so the battle meant a lot.

Isshin narrowed his eyes.

* * *

"It doesn't matter... She's just a traitor," he said in a firm voice.

Isshin still felt the same weird emotions as before, but he'd cast them aside.

He didn't want to mess up the competition because of his emotions, but he felt angry every time he saw Sumire.

Why didn't she tell him anything if she thought of him as a party member for even for a moment?

'It probably means that someone like me didn't matter from the beginning... '

Tap, tap.

Isshin began walking toward the portal on the stage. As soon as he walked out of the building, the skylights poured down on him.

The audience started to cheer and, in the middle of it all, Sumire was waiting for him.

Badump, badump.

For some reason, his heart started to beat faster when he saw her.

He couldn't calm himself down, and his chest felt heavy.

Isshin tried to ignore Sumire and placed his eyes on the audience.

- The participants of the last round have gathered! Korea vs. Japan! Everything goes to the victor of this battle! Mr. Soichi...

While Yuki's noisy voice spread over the audience, Sumire spoke to Isshin in a low voice.

"Kirishima..."

To think that Sumire, who always used to avoid looking at him or even avoided running into him, would talk to him. He couldn't help but frown in the midst of the unbelievable situation. He did his best to ignore Sumire's words, but what he heard next caught him completely off guard.

"I'm sorry," Sumire said in a serious voice.

It was the first time Isshin had heard her speak in such a way.

"You..."

Isshin couldn't resist and turned his head, but Sumire didn't stop talking.

"I'm really sorry..."

Unlike her usual self, Sumire wasn't trembling. No, Isshin actually felt a shiver of fear run up his back.

"You! What are you..."

"I was scared that a lot of people got hurt because of me... I was really scared. I was worried about what the wounded people would say and how I was supposed to apologize... I was scared of everything."

‘Why now...?’

Why did he have to hear her apologizing right then? Isshin's hands

trembled. His heartbeat was fluctuating like crazy.

"I'm an egoist... I thought that you might get affected because of me... That's why I didn't tell you anything. If I had stayed in Japan..."

The more Sumire faced her past self, the stronger she became. Her fear was disappearing, and she wasn't trembling anymore.

"You would have had to deal with my mistake... That's why I escaped without saying anything. If Kirishima tried to stop me... I felt that I wouldn't have been able to escape to Korea."

Compared to Yuki's voice coming out of the speakers, Sumire's voice was faint, but Isshin could even hear her breathing.

"You, why... why now?!"

Isshin's emotions fluctuated.

As Isshin shouted at her with his eyes trembling, Sumire gave him a determined look.

"I felt like I had to tell you in order to be able to give it my all."

"What? You... You're an egoist until the end! Do you think I'll forgive you because you're sorry now?!"

Just like when he'd gone out for a walk, Isshin's head began hurting.

"We, no... I kept waiting for you. I believed that you'd return and fill the void left in the party... that..."

Isshin wanted to say that it was Sumire's place, but those words didn't come out of his mouth.

Isshin had learned swordsmanship and mental discipline thanks to his training, but all those efforts were in vain in front of what Sumire had said to him.

His breathing even became irregular, and he was unable to calm himself.

To Isshin, Sumire was a cruel egoist until the end.

"I won't return..." Sumire said in a firm voice.

Isshin clenched his teeth and looked down at Sumire, but she just gave him a determined stare.

"To me, my current party is more important... Because I'm an egoist, I won't return."



Isshin's heart broke into pieces at Sumire's words.

"I'm happy right now, so... I won't regret it."

Sumire hammered the final nail into the coffin.

"My party leader is YuSung..."

Isshin's eyes started to tremble.

- Okay, then, before the match starts, you two, please prepare yourselves in front of the portal!

Isshin couldn't hear Yuki's noisy commands.

"M-me too... No... I..."

Isshin couldn't finish his sentence and put a hand to his forehead.

The two stood in front of the portal.

Both of them looked different from their usual selves.

Isshin, who always had a blank expression, was giving Sumire a confused look.

Unlike her usual introverted self, Sumire's eyes were full of determination.

Their atmospheres had completely reversed.

- The match will begin!

With Yuki's voice...

SWOOSH!!

The portal started to emit light, and the match began. Sumire confidently walked toward the portal, and she heard Laplace as she crossed its border.

- Fufu, I didn't know you were such a good strategist...

- But I really liked how you looked.

Sumire felt confused at the sudden light that enveloped her, but Laplace continued to murmur in a sweet voice.

- That's why I'm going to reward you.

The light was too much to handle, and Sumire closed her eyes.

Chapter 114

[- Moonview Mountain -]

Sumire raised her head and read the holographic letters that had appeared before her. A clear moon shone in the night sky and a field of flowers extended into the distance.

'I'll give it my best... '

YuSung wanted to win, and that depended on the result of her fight. Her victory could decide YuSung's happiness; that's why Sumire couldn't relax.

Swoosh!

"The darkness... shall envelop the sun!"

Pang!

The ring on Sumire's hand began shining with a purple light and disappeared right as the sky was covered with black clouds.

The mana that spread around Sumire took the form of skeletons.

Sumire wasn't the worst student in the F class anymore. The synergy between Laplace's fragments and the artifact was incredible, and her strength was on another level.

"Victory... for the master! Destroy... the enemy!"

The death knight appeared in its heavy armor.

"Familiar Spirit Lilith... I came here to protect the master."

Lilith smiled seductively.

"Please, do your best in the battle..." Sumire commanded with a serious expression.

As soon as she gave the order, the death knight started to shout.

"Destroy the master's enemy!"

The skeletons all raised their weapons.

Crack! Crack!

The undead army began to advance. Isshin frowned and raised his sword.

"Such a large number? Hanajima... you didn't forget my Trait, right?"

Tsk.

As soon as Isshin got into position to perform a sword dance, red energy began rising from his sword.

Slash!

Isshin's sword drew a half-moon, and beautiful crimson energy followed its trajectory.

Slash!!

The skeletons turned to dust and scattered away. Their bodies turned into mana, and Isshin absorbed them like he was a black hole, and his sword energy turned even redder.

That was Isshin's S-rank Trait—Ghostly Energy.

The effect was simple: The more enemies it cut, the stronger he became as he absorbed their strength.

There was no better effect for a swordsman specialized in close-quarters fighting.

If he was stronger than his enemies, the number didn't matter. No, he could use them as a resource to get stronger.

Slash!!

The more undead he cut down, the more intense his sword energy became.

"Fufu... How dare you!"

His body stiffened at Lilith's voice. It was her effect, [Petrifying Gaze].

Before the effect spread through his body, Isshin stabbed his thigh without hesitation.

Paf!

Part of his barrier broke, and blood sprayed through the air.

[22% of the barrier has been destroyed.]

[Remaining barrier: 78%]

The hologram sent a warning, but Isshin didn't stop.

That was the difference information made.

Isshin knew that Sumire had turned Lilith into her familiar spirit and he knew of Lilith's skill, [Petrifying Gaze].

"Ugh! You!"

As Lilith moved back in surprise, the death knight rushed toward Isshin.

BOOM! Clang!

Isshin's swords broke the death knight's armor apart.

Pang!

As Isshin's sword kept absorbing power, it went from red to white, signifying the energy had wreaked its limit.

Slide.

Isshin sheathed his sword and began to murmur.

"White Ghost Nocturnal Travel..."

Slash!!

WHOOM-!

As Isshin unsheathed his sword and used his technique, the ghostly energy he'd gathered launched forward as a wave. Everything stopped for a second.

The undead horde surging forward was entirely cut in half.

A crack appeared in the death knight's armor, and Lilith's barrier broke.

Though she was a rank 5 boss, Lilith was weak in terms of fighting.

On the other hand, Isshin was the strongest student in Japan when it came to fighting multiple enemies.

Swoosh!

The undead were turned to mana and absorbed by Isshin.

It was a continuous cycle.

"Everyone, fight until the end! For the master! Des... troy the enemy!" the death knight shouted, but it seemed like Isshin had the advantage.

The strength of Laplace Sumire had shown thus far was only a portion of it.

- It seems like you need my strength.

Laplace, a rank 7 boss known as a 'disaster', the plague witch, murmured sweetly in Sumire's head.

- You cute child... It seems like you really just crave moments with that person.

Sumire replied with determination in her eyes.

"Please... Give me your strength!"

- Fufu, okay. I'll lend it to you. Laplace replied with a laugh.

- We're not too different... I really like you. If there's something you want, feel free to ask me.

Fwoosh!

The world had stopped.

Sumire's eyes were covered by a black cloud, and her vision went dark. As the clouds moved, Moonview Mountain turned into Laplace's Castle.

- There are many things I want to talk about with you...

Laplace, who was sitting on the throne, looked down at Sumire while making a seductive, witch-like smile.

- Fufu, I'll be satisfied with giving you this gift today.

Sumire nodded, a serious expression on her face. Laplace motioned

with her finger as if she were telling her to get closer.

- Come, sit here.

Laplace indicated a place next to her throne.

"This..."

As Sumire slowly walked toward the throne, Laplace made her sit on it.

- It's my throne, and this is my accessory.

Tap. Slide.

Laplace put the flower accessory on Sumire's head.

- As expected, it suits you.

Laplace smiled at her.

She murmured in her ears as a farewell.

- Okay, then... my child. Show your strength to the entire world.

Sumire's expression began to change. Her eyes relaxed, and she was making a bright smile.

* * *

Boom! Slash!

Isshin kept cutting at the undead.

Slish!

A bit more...

Crack!

A little bit more...

Boom!

The opponent's mana was limited, and his strength, thanks to the ghostly energy, was limitless. Isshin thought he just had to cut the enemies before him until she ran out.

He believed he could win like that.

WHOOM.

The clear moon in the sky was soon covered by a black fog.

An unpleasant energy swept away the surroundings, and Isshin felt a strange tingling sensation.

Isshin looked at the dark sky as he stabbed a ghoul—the black clouds were starting to move away, and then, a red moon became visible.

The black clouds sat over Moonview Mountain and emitted ominous energy.

Swoosh-

The clouds at the top of the mountain began to move away, revealing an unknown throne and a smiling Sumire sitting atop it.

Slash!

The ghouls, the skeletons, the death knight, Lilith—all of the undead knelt before the queen. Sumire smiled, relaxed upon her throne as she looked down on them.



"Hanajima, you..."

Isshin was surprised.

Sumire spoke in a sultry voice, unlike her usual self.

"Cry..."

The undead began to shout at the queen's voice. The skeletons were given weapons, the ghouls' fingernails turned red, and sword ki started to emanate from the death knight's swords. Not only that but a whip that looked like an artifact appeared in Lilith's hands.

It was the strength of a rank 7 boss—the strength of the plague witch, Laplace.

"Mr. Kirishima... For my important person... I cannot lose. No matter what. Even if I have to use all of my strength, I'll win."

As Sumire mentioned someone important to her, Isshin's eyebrows started to wiggle.

"Then should we start the 2nd round?"

Sumire gave a relaxed smile.

Isshin hesitated.

"Hanajima-!!"

Isshin rushed toward Sumire.

Tap-!

Wounds appeared on the ghouls' claws, and he stepped on the skeletons' heads.

"I...!"

His barrier was broken by Lilith's whip, but he didn't stop. Isshin deflected the death knight's greatsword.

BOOM!

He cut through the army of the undead.

"I believed that you'd return-!"

Isshin's entire body was covered with ghostly energy, and his eyes were shining with a red light as if he were a demon.

Tap!

His fortified body moved at a speed beyond a human's.

His sword was aimed at Sumire, who was sitting on the throne.

Sumire didn't reply to Isshin—she just looked at him with a blank expression.

Her eyes were similar to when she was looking at her beloved violet flowers.

"Ugh..."

Isshin's red eyes shook as he looked at Sumire.

"As expected, Mr. Kishima, you're weak to affection..." she murmured as she made a smile he had never seen before.

Sumire extended her hand.

Paf-!

At the same time, Isshin's chest was pierced with black energy.

[The barrier has been broken.]

[Remaining barrier: 0%]

Isshin fell after being hit by Sumire's attack. Isshin's defeat was decided in an instant.

"I lost..."

Sumire didn't need to rely on Isshin anymore. She didn't need his help. She only looked at Shin YuSung.

"Hanajima... What was I to you?"

Sumire fell into thought at Isshin's bittersweet smile and then replied, "A companion, probably...?"

She wasn't the Sumire he knew.

"But... Mr. Kisihima, you didn't come," she said in a dark voice.

"When I was alone and struggling... You didn't stand beside me and give me courage."

Sumire's way of speaking was too foreign to Isshin. His heart rapidly began beating as an unknown emotion surged within him.

Sumire's mouth started to move again.

"Still, I'm thankful to Mr. Kirishima... Thanks to you, I was able to meet my YuSung."

She looked too beautiful as she blushed at her own words.

That expression hurt Isshin more than anything else.

Swoosh.

Isshin's body began turning into holographic fragments and started to disappear.

'If... if I... had gone to see you, Hanajima... '

Isshin began thinking about those moments he had missed as he looked at Sumire.

'Would things have been different.....?'

Isshin made a bittersweet smile.

'As expected, Hanajima, I... '

The world was crumbling and changing in front of him, and Isshin slowly closed his eyes.

Chapter 115

The Korea and Japan match.

Thanks to the final result ending in 2:1, the winner was decided in the Korea vs. Japan match.

"Thanks to student Sumire's win in the 3rd round, the winning team is Korea! The Japanese team will move onto the losers division and later participate for the wild card slot, and..."

Before Yuki's explanation ended, Sumire walked toward Shin YuSung, who was standing next to the portal.

Paf!

"Mr. YuSung! I did it!"

Sumire hugged YuSung, a smile on her face. She looked at him like a dog waiting to be praised.

"I... really wanted to win... for you... YuSung!"

She gave a weirdly sly smile that didn't seem usual for her.

"Sumire, we were able to win thanks to you."

Shin YuSung smiled at her.

Sumire's queen-like atmosphere was nowhere to be seen, and she touched her own head.

She was asking for him to pat her head. Seeing her acting like that, YuSung removed Laplace's accessory.

'It seems like this is influencing her.'

Tap.

"Ah...? Ugh, ah..."

Surprised, Sumire stepped back from YuSung.

"I... I'm sorry! I acted strangely..."

As Sumire quickly apologized, Shin YuSung smiled when he saw she had returned to her original self.

"No. Well done, Sumire."

YuSung patted Sumire just like she'd asked, and she smiled and blushed.

"Ah, ugh..."

Yuki watched them while making a troubled expression.

"Okay! We're going to interview the winner and proceed to give the reward from the Hunter's Association!"

Two men wearing suits carried out a luxurious box that contained an artifact from the 50th floor.

'The Thousand-Year-Old Jade...!'

It was the first time Shin YuSung had seen it, but he already knew about the Thousand-Year-Old Jade.

'It's the artifact Master obtained with his partners... '

The strength in the Thousand-Year-Old Jade could fortify your body and mana, but the Fist King and his partners had already reached the peak, so it was useless for them.

The growth potential was lower for hunters that were already too strong, so it wasn't worth it.

If a student with a lot of potential absorbed it, though, its effect couldn't even be estimated.

'It seems like they donated the artifact to help raise their successors.'

The artifact was obtained by Shin YuSung's party. The Thousand-Year-Old Jade was an artifact that carried the will of the Fist King and his partners. Shin YuSung made a satisfied smile.

'If I could absorb all of the Thousand-Year-Old Jade's strength... '

Shin YuSung wasn't sure how strong he'd be able to become if he did such a thing. Sumire was happy when she saw how excited Shin YuSung was.

"I'm happy... I was able to be helpful to YuSung..." she sincerely said.

Sumire, who used to be the worst student, grabbed YuSung's hands and was doing a great job. All of it was the result of Shin YuSung's trust.

WHOOM-

Steps could be heard approaching them.

"Sumire! You're the best-! Hehehe, party leader, I knew we would win! Today's broadcast has been a huge success!"

It was Amy.

It seemed like she'd come running as soon as the broadcast was over.

"Heh... hehehe..."

Sumire wasn't rejecting any praise that day. She seemed really happy while being close to YuSung.

SiWoo tried his best to smile.

"Thank you, Sumire. We almost lost because of me..."

"B-but... Hehe, this was the result of everyone doing their best. Y-YuSung also won the 1st round..."

Sumire looked at Shin YuSung and blushed. The atmosphere was good thanks to winning the 1st round of the International Competition.

* * *

With the winner decided, that round of the International Competition was reaching its end.

- No. Well done, Sumire.

- Ah, hehe...

Isshin heard YuSung and Sumire's voices as he stared at the stage with glazed eyes.

'Hanajima... '



Surrounded by her new party members, Sumire looked happy. She displayed a smile he'd never seen before.

Maybe Isshin and Sumire were never a true 'party'.

The two had never been party members that truly believed in each other.

Isshin didn't trust Sumire's skills; he used to think that she was someone he had to protect.

Somehow, she had grown stronger than him. He wasn't sure what had happened in Korea, but she seemed happier than before.

Shin YuSung and her Korean party members had given her the trust and support that he hadn't been able to, so the only thing Isshin could do was show a bitter smile.

'The reason why I extended my hand to Hanajima... '

Maybe it wasn't just to gain a party member. Although she used to be weaker than others, he couldn't help but care for her because he hadn't wanted to see her being pushed around by others.

That wasn't an emotion one could feel toward a party member.

He felt cold.

It hurt, and it was uncomfortable.

He finally understood what the emotions he felt toward Sumire were.

'Of course, it's already too late... '

Paf!

Isshin felt someone's arms wrap around him.

"Isshin! Sakura! Good job!" Party leader Seiji said while smiling.

Sakura smirked when she saw Seiji smile despite them having lost.

"Hngh~ You've suffered a huge loss, yet you recovered quickly."

"I discovered I'm weak, so I must get stronger! There's no time to be sad, right?"

Seiji's answer resembled Ryuko's. Sakura looked at Isshin and spoke.

"...So he says"

Isshin, who was staring blankly at Sumire, nodded a bit late.

"Yes..."

He felt that something that had been shaking his emotions vanished. It'd been a long time since his head felt so calm.

The cat...

The raining day...

The white violet flower...

It all made him think of Sumire. He looked up at a light shining from the sky. It was something he'd never be able to see if he kept looking back. Throwing away the rest of his restraints, Isshin smiled.

"Let's go back."

Sumire, who had been timid and a bit dumb-looking, was his first love. She was a good person with a weak heart. It was time for him to admit his past mistakes and let them go.

* * * *

Many years prior...

Fist King Yu WonHak spoke to Shin YuSung as they stood next to a bonfire within a cave.

[Now that I think about it... there's something I regret.]

Shin YuSung's master had never mentioned regrets before.

[Master... you regret something...?] Shin YuSung asked in surprise.

Yu WonHak began touching his beard.

[There's no need to be so surprised! It's just that, now that I think about it, there's something I regret a bit.]

After turning over the meat on the skewer, Yu WonHak kept talking.

[I never thought I'd end up raising a disciple.]

As Yu WonHak looked at him, Shin YuSung smiled.

[I gave that friend all of the artifacts I didn't need.]

They were things Yu WonHak, who'd become the strongest, didn't need. He had reached a point where he didn't need the help of artifacts anymore, but his disciple, Shin YuSung, was different.

If he had the artifacts he'd left behind, Shin YuSung would have been able to grow even faster.

[Among them... there's the Black Dragon's Hide and a few others, but as expected, there's one I regret leaving behind the most...]

It was the best artifact for making someone grow rapidly.

[Master, what's that?] Shin YuSung asked, his eyes shining.

Yu WonHak replied in a serious tone.

[It's the Thousand-Year-Old Jade!]

It was a jade that had absorbed mana for almost a thousand years. One could increase the potential of mana up to a certain point with that artifact.

[By absorbing the strength of the Thousand-Year-Old Jade, you can reduce the amount of time needed to cultivate your mana.]

As Yu WonHak stroked his beard in disappointment, Shin YuSung shouted confidently.

[I'll train a lot, so I don't need such an artifact!]

Back then, YuSung never imagined he'd end up getting the Black Dragon's Hide and the Thousand-Year-Old Jade.

‘Yet I have them both... ’

Thanks to his victory in the national tournament and the International Competition, YuSung obtained both the Black Dragon's Hide and the Thousand-Year-Old Jade.

If YuSung were able to absorb that strength, he would be able to gain even more power, but there was some risk in absorbing the Thousand-Year-Old Jade because a huge strength was sealed inside of it. He needed to treat it seriously.

'I need a time and place to concentrate... '

YuSung gripped the Thousand-Year-Old Jade tightly.

Chapter 116

Shin YuSung was in a dark room.

The room was a completely sealed place created with a specific goal in mind. Sound and light were both blocked. It was a place designed to increase one's concentration so they could train their mana.

Not only that but the building's foundation was built with a very strong material.

'This place should be good enough.'

YuSung took out the Thousand-Year-Old Jade and smiled.

He was the only student who could absorb the Thousand-Year-Old Jade, so it was natural that he obtained it.

'The Thousand-Year-Old Jade... '

Shin YuSung concentrated harder—he couldn't make any mistakes.

'I have to absorb as much... no, all the mana in the Thousand-Year-Old Jade.'

BOOM! Crash!

As YuSung crushed the Thousand-Year-Old Jade, mana poured out of it.

PAAF! BZZT!

The mana gathered, formed a sphere, and started moving erratically.

Pang! Boom!

Although the mana inside the Thousand-Year-Old Jade was unprocessed, pure mana, there was simply too much of it.

BOOM!

The spherical body of mana hit the wall. A normal human's bones would shatter if the sphere of mana touched them, but...

Paf!

YuSung absorbed the mana from the Thousand-Year-Old Jade.

"Ugh...!"

He felt a mind-blowing pain when he tried to grab the mana moving through the passageway that was so huge that even he struggled.

‘I have to withstand it.’

He had no other choice.

If he wanted to fully absorb the strength of the Thousand-Year-Old Jade, he had to absorb even more mana and resist even greater pain.

YuSung went through harsh training to get stronger. Thanks to that, his mental strength was incredibly strong, which enabled him to resist such immense pain.

PANG-!!

The mana sphere moved again.

Paf! Paf!

Every time the sphere hit his body and went through his skin, YuSung flinched. It was as if he was being torn apart from the inside.

Whenever he absorbed a part of the mana sphere, though, he felt strength surge through his body.

Even through the pain, getting stronger felt good.

'How long would it take me to get this strong with normal means?'

Having a lot of mana was equal to having a lot of fuel. It would allow him to increase the duration of Black Dragon's Body Armor and other techniques with huge destructive power, which would help greatly in fights.

'One year? Two years? No, I might not have been able to get this much mana until even after graduating.'

Thanks to the Thousand-Year-Old Jade, Shin YuSung was skipping that tiring process.

Three hours passed.

The door eventually opened, and an intense light leaked through.

Tap, tap.

YuSung slowly walked out of it.

Paf! Ssss...

The mana within his body was emitting a blue aura, and his gaze looked stronger.

'So this is the strength of the Thousand-Year-Old Jade... '

He felt that the mana inside his body had greatly increased.

Ting!

[You've absorbed mana with a different characteristic from what you already had.]

[Current stabilization level: 22%]

[Remaining time until it reaches 100% is 182 hours.]

A hologram appeared in front of him.

The Pocket had felt the change in Shin YuSung's mana, so it explained the situation in great detail.

'I guess a week will be enough.'

He had a ton of strength, but it hadn't settled yet. He couldn't imagine how much stronger he'd become when all the steps had ended.

Maybe YuSung would be able to reach the Battle God's Style 5th Form.

'If it's this strength... '

Maybe he'd be able to defeat the next head of the Shin-oh family, Shin HaYoon, and her telekinesis.

'I'll definitely... '

Shin YuSung had never faced Shin HaYoon before, so he couldn't even imagine what would happen.

After all, HaYoon had never shown her full strength.

Since he had obtained the mana within the jade, he had a chance of winning.

* * *

[You're a sensible and weak kid who gets easily hurt. Just like a greenhouse plant... Could you withstand what hunters need to go through?]

Kim YunHa wasn't wrong.

She tried to act strong, but in reality, she was quite sensible. She was hurt by unexpected farewells.

[You'll probably break... Wouldn't it be better if you left the party before you broke even more?]

If she got even closer to the other party members, if she ended up relying on Shin YuSung even more, if she completely opened her heart...

What if someone like that ended up getting hurt?

If she was forced to say farewell to him, would she be able to withstand it?

Those questions were making Kim EunAh's head hurt, but those were things she'd already thought of.

"I... already know that."

Kim EunAh took a deep breath and tried to calm herself as much as possible.

YunHa didn't know how she'd gotten close to them and why she'd decided to stay in the party.

"But then... I'll always be alone."

Kim EunAh's voice was barely audible.

YunHa's eyebrows shook a bit.

"Why do you say you're alone? You have people all around you—"

As Kim YunHa changed her attitude and tried to make her feel good, Kim EunAh quickly interrupted her.

"Who's at my side...?"

Lee SuHyun bit her lips at Kim EunAh's heavy voice. Even to an adult like Lee SuHyun, seeing the weak side of someone she appreciated hurt.

'EunAh... '

Kim EunAh smiled while trying to hide her emotions.

"Do you think I'm not aware...? Do you think I don't know why people are trying to get close to me?"

YunHa was trying to act strong, but it was clear that she was flustered.

"EunAh, that's..."

"It's all because of my background. They don't know the real me, what I like, what I do the best. They just want to get close to me... It isn't because of me. It's because my mom, dad, and grandfather are impressive people..."

EunAh looked into YunHa's eyes.

"Do you know how annoying that is...?"

"EunAh..."

YunHa was lost for words. It was she who'd left EunAh alone due to all of her work. She knew how much her daughter suffered from loneliness.

Thanks to Lee SuHyun's report, she knew that EunAh was silently crying at her oppa's status, but she'd avoided looking at those problems while telling herself that the reality was that nothing could be done.

The one who got hurt the most was Kim EunAh, who was still 17.

"YuSung and the others... They're different. Even if oppa and I weren't part of a jaebol, he would've saved us... He knows what I like. He knows what I do the best."

She continued to mumble, her head lowered.

"We went to the cafe together, to the mountain. We even danced at the ball together... And he even gave me an orca... And..."

Kim EunAh shed tears.

How much of a crybaby was her daughter? YunHa was trying to make her give up being in a party with the excuse of it being for her own good.

YuSung was the disciple of the Fist King; he was aiming to become the world's strongest hunter. If she remained in his party, even if Kim EunAh was talented, she would encounter problems, but EunAh was suffering from YunHa's actions.

"I... I also know that. After all, I was really scared of getting too close to them... but I had just started to open my heart to them..."

Kim EunAh was trying to hold back her tears, and her voice was getting lower from the effort.

"Mom... You're trying to separate me already... I won't be able to get close to anyone anymore..."

YunHa's heart was breaking.

Even if she was famous for being cold, it was hard to see her daughter crying in front of her.

As YunHa avoided Kim EunAh's eyes, Lee SuHyun moved her head.

Nod.

Even if Lee SuHyun hadn't said anything, Kim YunHa knew what she meant—she was trying to say that she should give Kim EunAh a chance.

Kim YunHa got up.

Tap, tap.

She slowly walked toward her daughter. The sound of her high heels echoed through the room, and then she silently hugged her daughter.



EunAh's eyes widened in surprise. YunHa patted her daughter's back

with her soft hands.

"EunAh, I'm sorry... You were really lonely, right?"

EunAh made a surprised expression at the unexpectedly kind words from her mother, but she ended up bursting into tears.

"Ugh... Sniff. Mom, ah, sniff..."

It wasn't an easy choice for YunHa, but she had no other options. It was her mistake for ignoring her daughter's loneliness because she was busy with work. She'd made a mistake as a parent, so that's why Kim EunAh relied more on YuSung than her.

It was YuSung who healed Kim EunAh's lonely heart.

YunHa had no right to separate them.

"Don't cry. I'm sorry."

Pat, pat.

When YunHa patted her back, Kim EunAh began crying even more. As expected, she was a crybaby among crybabies. SuHyun smiled in satisfaction as she watched EunAh.

Chapter 117

A jaebol mother-and-daughter hug.

SuHyun made a satisfied smile as she watched over them.

'Well, this looks good... '

Even if they didn't have as many benefits, many companies were looking to hire Lee SuHyun, who was a rank 6 hunter. If she lost her job, she could easily find a new one.

On the other hand, she'd gone against YunHa's orders and done something that would change the course of EunAh's life.

'It's too bad that I'm going to be fired, but at least EunAh was able to remain in the party.'

YunHa said something unexpected as she hugged her daughter.

"Secretary Lee SuHyun...? Although I'm the mother, maybe you know more about EunAh than I do."

"Yes...? N-no! Madam!"

As Lee SuHyun shook her head, Kim YunHa smiled.

"No. I learned how much you care for EunAh. That's why you went against my orders, right?"

"Yes? Th-that's..."

Kim YunHa started to laugh in a soft voice at SuHyun's surprise.

"You're humble until the end... It seems like both EunAh and I are

lucky in terms of people we have close to us."

Since the boss of the Shinsung Group, a person famous for being cold, said it with a warm expression on her face, Lee SuHyun couldn't deny it anymore.

"Th-thanks for having such a positive opinion of me...!"

"No. It's I who must salute you. I hope you keep taking good care of EunAh."

Things were flowing in an unexpected direction, and SuHyun felt beads of nervous sweat dripping down her back.

"Ha... haha..."

"Also... Secretary Lee SuHyun, I'm sure you were quite troubled by this incident, so I'm going to give you a small gift in thanks."

A small gift from Kim YunHa... How much was that going to be? Though YunHa might have thought of it as 'small', for SuHyun, it was definitely going to be a lot of money.

"Th-thanks, madam..."

In the end, Lee SuHyun lost to capitalism.

EunAh slightly turned her head from her mother's arms and looked at SuHyun.

EunAh's eyes were still red, was it because of how much she had cried? She smiled at SuHyun.

"I hope we get along from now on too..."

It was an awkward but warm atmosphere.

'As expected, was all of my worry for nothing...?'

There were many things for her to be worried about, of course, but she made a forced smile at the sweet taste of the Shinsung Group's overwhelming riches.

"Yes! Yes! Miss!"

* * * *

In the Hunter Association...

"Haha... I'm glad that YuSung won the first round..." Kang YuChan said to Mei Lin while looking out the window.

"I've seen many parties, but never have I seen a party of 1st-year students as strong as Shin YuSung's."

Kang YuChan laughed at Mei Lin's statement.

"I'm not sure about other aspects, but that Yu WonHak did a great job in raising his disciple."

"With some luck in the events... Korea might really win the International Competition."

"Haha, yes. That should happen, of course."

Kang YuChan looked at the documents as he laughed—they were important things that needed oversight from the Hunter Association President.

"Yes... Liú Jùn of Skyscraper Academy. According to the rumors, the Sword God gave him the secret book he obtained from the Tower."

YuChan smirked at Mei Lin's report.

"Yu WonHak probably stimulated him. To think that their disciples would also become rivals, hahaha!"

He was the president of the Association, but Kang YuChan still

remembered the glory days.

Korea's Fist King...

China's Sword God...

England's Witch...

Italy's Silver Wind...

And Kang YuChan himself. The peace that humanity was enjoying was the result of their sacrifices.

"I still prefer YuSung, but at this point, it's hard to cheer for only one student."

Mei Lin nodded at Kang YuChan's words.

"I also want YuSung to win, but it's hard to make a guess at this point."

"We have a lot of information on the promising candidates, right?"

YuChan had asked for information about a certain person among them.

"Especially Lorelei, even I'm wondering about him... Isn't the nickname 'Witch of Time' too grandiose for a 1st-year student?"

"I'm sorry... I wasn't able to find much information on Lorelei of England."

"I guess it's understandable if she's the disciple of that woman! Haha, to think that her disciple would also be so mysterious... It seems like they're too similar."

YuChan laughed, touched his pocket, and gave the quest's details to Mei Lin.

Paf!

[Tower Entrance Permission]

[1st Goal: 10th Floor]

[Allowed number of people: 5]

[※ Attention: If the 1st goal is fulfilled, the Administrator must verify.]

It seemed like Mei Lin noticed something as she read the hologram.

"Ah, it's what you mentioned before..."

"WonHak talks about the Tower so much. The 1st round ended, so there's enough time, right?"

"The Tower's 10th floor seems like it will be a good experience for them."

As Mei Lin nodded, YuChan smiled and made a serious expression.

"Yes, YuSung's party members are strong enough to do it."

The Tower's 10th floor...

For a legendary hunter like Kang YuChan, it was easy, but for students, the Tower was an unknown, mysterious structure.

Kang YuChan was allowing such a mysterious structure to be accessed by Shin YuSung in his 1st-year.

He smiled as he looked out the window.

'Even I'm wondering how much stronger you'll become, YuSung... '

For Association President Kang YuChan, YuSung served as a solid

pillar of support.

* * *

It was the same day they returned from Japan, and Shin YuSung was walking toward the club room.

Tap, tap.

'I have quite some time until the next round. Once I'm done absorbing the Thousand-Year-Old Jade... I should prepare for the next round with my party.'

Although they'd beaten the Japanese team, Shin YuSung wasn't planning to relax.

'For that... '

Shin YuSung opened the club room while making a serious expression.

'As the party leader, I should figure out what the members need to improve on... '

Clack.

Shin YuSung couldn't help but stop at the unexpected scene that unfolded before him.

"...?!"

It was a sight that shocked even YuSung, who wasn't a person that was easy to impress—the orca doll was devouring someone's head.



"I'm shawwy..."

A familiar voice was coming from the doll.

"EunAh...?" YuSung asked in confusion.

"I'm shawwy fo not goin t'the Internashional Competition."

"It's okay. Family... I mean, you had a reason for not being able to make it, right?"

Shin YuSung tried to console her, a smile on his face, but Kim EunAh kept apologizing while putting her hand on her knee.

"Shtill, shawwy... I want t'be eaten like thish awnd... die."

In the end, Shin YuSung removed the orca from EunAh's head and finally looked at her face.

Half of the reason why Kim EunAh's face was red was that she was feeling sorry for the party members, and the other half was because she was feeling ashamed of the puppet show.

"YuSung... I'm sorry. Because of my family..."

As EunAh apologized while avoiding his gaze, Shin YuSung smiled.

"It's okay."

"You don't even know what happened. How could you forgive me so easily? Aren't you angry?" Kim EunAh said while tearing up.

"Not at all. There was probably a good reason for that, right? Also, you're a party member."

Kim EunAh remained silent for a while at Shin YuSung's answer; then, she put her head into the orca again.

"Leev me like dish..."

He couldn't understand the reasoning behind Kim EunAh's actions, but it was her real personality and look. He liked how Kim EunAh had changed.

'Should I leave her like this for now...?'

YuSung was also starting to change.

Chapter 118

Tang-!!

A bullet exploded from the barrel of the gun.

Paf!

Lee SiWoo's shooting skills were perfect. The bullet pierced the center of the target. Although he'd sworn not to use the gun again, there he was, holding a gun.

'It was a dumb thought from the beginning... '

Tang! Tang! Tang!

Lee SiWoo didn't need a gauge or a power source when he had his pistol. He destroyed every target through reliance on his senses.

'Am I really going to keep using the bow just because of my father...?'

As Lee SiWoo reloaded, he grabbed another pistol from his waist and spun it around.

Clank! Swing-!

Holding a pistol in each hand, SiWoo began shooting.

Pat! Tang! Tang!

'I don't like reaching out to my father, but... '

Lee SiWoo had made up his mind after his loss. He realized the road he had to walk.

[YuSung... I'll be back soon. I'm sorry, I need some time.]

[SiWoo, I'll be waiting for you.]

'I'd rather quit than become baggage.'

Rather than dealing with his mixed emotions regarding guns, Lee SiWoo wanted to be as helpful as possible to YuSung, who trusted him.

'If I want to remain in the party, I should at least become strong enough not to become a burden.'

It wasn't time to complain. SiWoo discarded his pride and bowed his head toward his father.

[I was wrong. Father, you were right. That's why, please, have me undergo 'that' training.]

Lee SiWoo didn't like how satisfied his authoritative father looked.

[Pff, I knew it from the beginning—from the moment you started talking about bows and archery. You should've done this from the beginning!]

His sister's know-it-all reaction also annoyed him, but none of it broke his resolve.

'If I can get stronger, it doesn't matter.'

He wanted to become stronger before the International Competition was over and then be able to support Shin YuSung. If it were for that goal, he could temporarily cast aside his negative feelings regarding his father.

* * * *

She reflected on her situation from within the orca's mouth.

Tap!

It seemed like she wasn't feeling suffocated at all. Kim EunAh took the orca off of her head after a while. She still felt sorry, but she seemed more comfortable than before.

"But... congrats on winning. If you'd lost, I would have died from remorse..." Kim EunAh was tearing up.

"It was thanks to Sumire. Although she obtained the strength of the fragment, it isn't easy to use that strength."

"I was really impressed... In the end, it was you, YuSung, who brought Sumire in, and she became strong thanks to you."

Shin YuSung had brought Sumire, the worst student, in as a party member, and she had become the sort of person who could stand her ground next to anyone else. She was a proud asset in Gaon's party.

Kim EunAh wanted to say all that, but she was struggling to open her mouth.

It wasn't that she was trying to hide it, but it was that saying such a thing made her feel embarrassed.

After taking a deep breath, EunAh got a hold of herself and made a serious expression.

"Why I couldn't go to the International Competition... In reality, it was because of my mother. She was against me working as a hunter..."
Kim EunAh absently stroked the orca as YuSung gave her a silent look.

'Was it because of the inherent danger...?'

Taking into consideration EunAh's social standing, it was something that was bound to happen. To YuSung, Kim EunAh was his party member, but for the rest, Kim EunAh was the heir of Korea's biggest jaebol dynasty.

From the Shinsung Group's perspective, the risk in EunAh working as

a hunter was too high.

"I know that... To be honest, I realize I have too heavy of a background."

YuSung silently sat next to EunAh as she continued to fiddle with the orca.

Then, a smile appeared on EunAh's face, and she opened her mouth.

"Still, I'm going to do what I have fun doing." Her face turned red.

Although she was struggling to vocalize it, she kept speaking.

"...And I have the most fun around you guys."

* * *

Besides her family, YuSung and her party members were the first ones she had opened her heart to; that's why she liked them so much.

"I even argued with my mother and insisted that I would be staying with you guys... To be honest, it isn't that I want to become a strong hunter, but..." Kim EunAh scratched her neck nervously and covered her face with the orca.

"You know what I want to say, right...?" Kim EunAh was still embarrassed to say things like that.

Shin YuSung nodded. "Yes, that's also the case for me."

Shin YuSung also had the most fun when he was with Kim EunAh and the other party members. He learned things he didn't know before, ate new things, and felt new sensations. He felt that he was changing as time went on.

"That's why you don't have to worry. I'll never let you guys get hurt."

That was one of the reasons YuSung wanted to get stronger—to

protect those that were important to him.

"Hmm..." EunAh silently looked at him.

They may have stopped talking for a moment, but the atmosphere wasn't awkward.

Kim EunAh felt as if a heavy burden had been lifted from her.

"You didn't forget you agreed to come to our group's ball, right?" She could even make playful questions.

"I even taught you how to dance. So you must come." She gave him a soft look when someone knocked on the door.

"Hmm, who is it?"

They wouldn't knock like that if they were Sumire or another party member, so it was definitely an outside visitor.

Kim EunAh put the orca down on the sofa and opened the door.

Clack-



"Hi."

The visitor looked at EunAh and smiled. She looked so young that it was hard to believe that she had a daughter.

The visitor was the CEO of the ShinSung Group—Kim YunHa.

"Wh-what?! Mom, why are you here?!" EunAh seemed flustered.

YunHa just smiled in satisfaction and crossed her arms. "My daughter is here, so I have no reason for not being able to visit."

As YunHa entered the club room with her bodyguards, the principal, Jin ByungCheol, also entered.

"You should have contacted me beforehand! I would have sent someone to guide you!"

"It's okay. I already knew where the room was." YunHa smiled. Her elegance showed in even her smallest movements.

The news that a star was visiting Gaon quickly spread through the staff and even the students.

"Woah! How amazing! I often see her on the news!"

"Such a person went to a student's club room?"

"Well. She's Kim EunAh's mother, after all."

Students gathered in the hallway and caused a commotion.

Jin ByungCheol shouted, "Instructor Lin Xiao! Please control the students! Haha, madam... if anything bothers you during your visit here, please let me know without hesitation! Haha!"

Although he was the principal, Jin ByungCheol did his best to look good before her.

Kim EunAh didn't like that her mother had visited the school.

"Aah! Mom! Why are you here? This is embarrassing!"

"Are you embarrassed by your mother? Also, my daughter is here, so I

was planning to come at least once. Not only that, but I wanted to see student Shin YuSung with my own eyes."

Kim YunHa smiled at Shin YuSung.

Although she wasn't a hunter and had no mana, one could feel a sense of pressure from her.

"Student Shin YuSung... could we talk in private?" YunHa asked, still smiling.

Taking her social standing into consideration, it was a very humble attitude.

"That's what I wanted to ask you... After all, EunAh is what I would consider a very important member of my party."

YunHa smiled at his reply.

'We'll have to see if that's all she is to you... '

There were many things YunHa wanted to know about Yusung.

Chapter 119

Within Gaon's reception room...

Kim YunHa and Shin YuSung sat across from each other. Although she looked similar to Kim EunAh, her atmosphere was completely different.

"Then I'll talk to you more casually."

"Thanks."

YuSung nodded at Kim YunHa's smile, and then she finally opened her mouth while making a relaxed expression.

"Our EunAh has been causing quite a bit of trouble, right...?"

Shin YuSung shook his head. "It's me who's receiving help. EunAh is a very helpful party member, after all."

"Really? Fufu... It makes me happy to hear good things about my child... But still, as a mother, I can't help but be worried."

Every time she raised the black tea, the atmosphere in the reception room got heavier. Kim YunHa raised her little finger and sipped the black tea.

Even that tiny movement portrayed her elegance.

"Even though EunAh tries to act strong, she's the type of person to easily get hurt. You know that, right?"

YuSung didn't answer her question. She'd shown her sensitive side when she'd opened her heart to him, but she'd also shown a huge mental strength when they hunted the rank 4 lake boss.

"Due to how she was raised, she doesn't care about what others think and likes to do things as she pleases. Not only that but because she gets easily wounded, she's quite prideful..."

Whish- Tap-

The spoon stirring the black tea stopped.

YunHa looked at Shin YuSung. "Even so, everyone in the family loves EunAh."

Shinsung Group's chairman and father, Kim SungHan...

Her mother, Kim YunHa...

And even her oppa, Kim JunHyuk. The entire family loved Kim EunAh, which was why she was special to them.

"Unlike us, EunAh is pure. It's really impressive~ Isn't it strange for someone like her to be born under such circumstances?"

She remained silent for a moment, a complex expression on her face, but then she sighed.

"Student YuSung... This is what our family thinks of EunAh. What do you think about her?"

At Kim YunHa's question, YuSung fell into thought. The first time he properly met Kim EunAh was during extracurricular activities. When he first met her, Kim EunAh portrayed an atmosphere of being the heir of a jaebol family that was cold and had a strong sense of pride.

The more they talked, the more YuSung realized that, just like him, she was a normal 17-year-old student.

EunAh felt anger at others' stories, and she felt sad about his past. Not only that, but she was strong enough to stand against those who did wrong, and she was also weak enough to cry when she thought about her oppa.

"When I first asked if she wanted to join my party, it was because EunAh was outstanding."

Among the 'Sevens' of the 1st year, she was placed 2nd.

She had an electricity Trait that could bolster their team's firepower—that was what YuSung used to think about her when they didn't know each other that well.

"Is that so...?" She looked at him as she drank her tea.

YuSung stared right back into her eyes. "That isn't the case anymore."

It was hard to explain with words, but Kim EunAh was an important party member to him, not just because she was outstanding.

No one would be able to replace her.

"In our party, EunAh is—"

"Wait." Kim YunHa extended her hand and stopped YuSung for a moment before she asked another question.

"I know that's what you think of her as a party member, but is that all?" Her expression made it look as if her pride had been hurt.

YuSung, who had spent 12 years on Martial Spirits' Mountain, couldn't understand what Kim YunHa was talking about.

"No, it's a bit embarrassing to say this with my own mouth, but... EunAh looks so... Don't you find her pretty?" she said.

YuSung still looked confused.

Kim YunHa frowned. She wanted to advise that they leave personal feelings aside until they became adults, but seeing that there were no other feelings involved hurt her pride.

"This... "

The tears Kim EunAh had shown in Japan.

Back when YunHa had seen the tears flowing from EunAh's eyes in Japan, she had realized something...

Although EunAh didn't know it yet, Kim YunHa, her mother, knew what EunAh's emotions were.

'It seems like it is EunAh who... '

She was feeling a weird sense of defeat.

She couldn't withstand her daughter being treated like that. It was only right that the other person liked her more than she liked them. If someone was to beg, it shouldn't be her.

Unfortunately, the reality was that it was the complete opposite.

"Student YuSung... From what EunAh told me, you wanted to come to the ShinSung Group's banquet, right?"

It seemed like YunHa wasn't satisfied with YuSung thinking about her daughter as just an important party member.

"Yes."

"I realize how good of a person you are... so come... okay?"

YunHa's pride was hurt, so she made sure he would come. YuSung didn't realize the change in Kim YunHa and nodded while smiling brightly.

"Understood."

"Okay...! Student YuSung, I hope you keep taking good care of EunAh."

Although they were both smiling, YunHa was burning with a sense of competitiveness.

In the club room after the incident...

As YuSung entered, Kim EunAh patted the sofa.

"Here!" She was telling him to sit next to her.

She asked him a question as he sat down.

"What did my mom say? She said something strange, right? Did she try to scare you? Did she ask you to kick me out of the party?"

"No. She just asked me to take good care of you."

"Take good care...? How weird. My mom isn't someone who'd say something like that." EunAh looked at YuSung with suspicious eyes.
"You aren't lying, right...?"

"No."

"Hmm..." She sighed and then stood up.

"Then I'm glad! To be honest... I wouldn't have been surprised if my mother offered you a couple million and asked you to kick me out of the party."

A couple million...

It didn't sound like a joke if she was the one saying it.

"I would've rejected it. To me, my party members are more important than money."

Kim EunAh's ears turned red at YuSung's answer.

"Forget it... Just prepare with the others to come to the banquet!"

After saying that, Kim EunAh walked out, and YuSung smiled as he watched her leave.

Many bothersome things had happened, but he was feeling satisfied. YuSung lay back on the sofa and looked outside.

'Should I go out today...?'

* * * *

The blue moon shone over the sky, and a woman wearing a suit looked down from the rooftop of a building.

"Target confirmed..." Her eyes were shining with blue light that indicated mana usage.

At that moment, she was watching a man walking through the darkness.

- Claw, can you do it alone?

ZZT. ZZT!

She held an analog radio in her hand, and the audio quality was very poor. Even so, older communication equipment was better if they wanted to avoid government surveillance.

"The opponent is as strong as a rank 5 hunter... Three minutes is enough."

Her voice sounded mechanical as it was warped by her mask's voice-changing capabilities.

ZZT!

- Really? I'm sorry to make you do it alone, but we need him if we want to get Cheat back.

Claw replied coldly, even to the man's cordial voice.

"To think you'd give another opportunity to such a screw-up. It seems like you lack what it takes to be a leader."

- Don't be like that. We need Cheat's hacking capabilities. Okay, Claw?

Zzzt!

A young woman's voice was heard speaking over him.

- Hngh, I can't keep listening to you. You young ones, stop complaining.

The radio went silent.

Claw's eyes shone sharply as she looked at her target.

'One must hunt when the target is alone.'

She waited for the hunt to begin.

Tap, tap, tap.

As soon as the man was alone and stopped moving, she spoke in an intense voice, as if bestowing a death sentence upon the man.

"Securing the target now..."



Chapter 120

In an old-fashioned treehouse placed within a beautiful outdoor garden with a flowing stream, Sakura spoke in a serious voice.

"What brings you here?"

Unlike her usual self, she wore a ponytail. She was also wearing orange sunglasses and informal clothes.

Lee SiWoo took a sip of black tea and casually asked, "Please, become my sparring partner. It'll last until I'm satisfied."

Sakura's eyes narrowed, and she ended up sighing. "You're going to keep the promise, right...?"

"Yes. You've also done a good job. If the dojo reopens, it will be recognized as a training place for City Guards again."

That was why Lee SiWoo had gone to see his father again. The family wanted him to use guns again and, after graduating from the Academy, for him to become his father's successor.

'Well, I have no intention of going under my father again.'

Lee SiWoo smiled at Sakura and calmly said, "So, what's your answer?"

Sakura had no reason to refuse Lee SiWoo's proposal, but she couldn't help but feel it was a bit unpleasant.

"But... why are you planning to help our dojo?" Sakura asked as she gave him a suspicious look.

"It just didn't feel good to leave things as they were. The archery taught in your dojo is indeed great, and I felt that my father forced something he shouldn't have."

Sakura's wariness eased when she heard his explanation. "Hmm... Then why do you want me as a sparring partner?"

SiWoo looked her in the eyes as he replied to her question. "There's no particular reason. It's just that you're the best shooter I know."

Sakura smirked, and it seemed like she enjoyed that answer.

"We'll do it until the second round starts," she firmly said.

Lee SiWoo extended his hand.

"That'll be enough."

What Lee SiWoo needed was time to recover his shooting senses. He needed to wipe away the rust and regain his former skill.

* * * *

Two days had passed since he began absorbing the Thousand-Year-Old Jade.

It wasn't enough time to get much stronger, but Shin YuSung felt a huge change within his body.

"This strength... "

Large amounts of mana moved deep within his body.

If the mana Shin YuSung already had was like a calm lake, the mana of the Thousand-Year-Old Jade was like a stormy sea.

"It's a massive amount of mana, but it's also dangerous... "

The strength was different from the strength of his normal mana.

"If I can control this strength, then I'll definitely... "

Shin YuSung clenched his fists. It was already impressive that he'd absorbed the strength of the Thousand-Year-Old Jade, but he was also trying to freely use that strength.

"YuSung, can I really go all out?" Kim EunAh asked him.

YuSung looked at Kim EunAh. She was laying on a tree, giving him a worried look.

She knew that YuSung was strong, but as a party member, she couldn't help but be worried.

Kim EunAh fiddled with her Pocket.

"Should I put the barrier up just in case?"

"No. It's better without the barrier." Shin YuSung shook his head.

He needed to increase his senses, so having something like a barrier up was bothersome to him.

"Hmm... Okay..."

She was asked to attack a partner with all her might, but despite not liking it, it was Shin YuSung who asked, so she couldn't help but accept.

"Recharge."

Paf! BZZT!!

A blue light surged around her, and the electricity had no sense of speed to it.

EunAh's only weakness appeared when she was preparing to attack. One could react to the attack just before she fully committed to it. If one missed that opportunity, the electricity would fry them.

'To think he'd try to go against such an attack head-on... '

EunAh focused mana onto her right hand. She was going to use a new skill she'd obtained after absorbing the Thunder Dragon's Orb.

"Orca!"

BZZT! BZZT-!

It was an image that was easy for her to envision.

As Kim EunAh shouted, an orca made of lightning came down from the sky. The orca stopped on the palm of her right hand.

Swoosh!

* * *



She absorbed the orca's figure, and an intense light shone from her hand.

BZZT-!!

It was so bright that it was even blinding.

It took a lot of preparation, but the destructive power of Kim EunAh's skill was on an entirely different level.

The land around them roiled, and EunAh gathered the mana onto her right index finger.

All she had to do was unleash it.

"Pierce-!"

Kim EunAh pointed her index finger toward Shin YuSung.

WHOOM-!!

It was as if all the world's light had gathered in a single point, and the lightning shot from her finger like a laser.

Pang-!

The recoil of the attack was so strong that Kim EunAh was pushed back. That was why Shin YuSung had chosen her as a sparring partner to develop the 5th form.

The electricity covered Shin YuSung's field of view.

'In terms of speed, it is faster than Telekinesis.'

Before the electricity pierced him, Shin YuSung concentrated harder.

'I can feel it. The mana gathered in a point, and there...!'

Shin YuSung felt a stronger wind pressure than when he was practicing the Battle God Style's 5th Form. He sensed the mana surging from EunAh more clearly than he could before.

What Shin YuSung wanted to cause was a 'Mana Resonance' that normally only happened by coincidence.

It was hard to experience even once over the course of a lifetime, but YuSung was trying to take advantage of his Trait and senses to control it.

'Stomach! Center!'

Shin YuSung extended his hand as he figured out where the attack would land.

'It doesn't matter if the amount used is low. The problem is using a wave of the same wavelength... '

To use the technique in real life, you needed to read the mana wavelength of the opponent's skill quickly. Even if you could succeed in activating a 'Mana Resonance', if you were too slow, you wouldn't be able to use it.

Paf!

The mana that spread from Shin YuSung's hands transformed and resonated with EunAh's at the same wavelength.

'This is enough mana to deflect it... '

Thanks to the strength of the Thousand-Year-Old Jade, YuSung's [Heightened Focus] was more intense than ever.

It looked as if time had stopped, and he clearly saw the form of the blue mana.

Battle God Style 5th Form Wave Resonance

Shin YuSung's shockwave collided with Kim EunAh's.

Pang-!

It wasn't that YuSung made Kim EunAh's attack disappear, but he changed its trajectory.

BZZT!!

In the end, EunAh's attack was deflected into the ground, and the heat of her mana melted the rock.

"So s-suddenly! My electricity hit the floor?!"

Kim EunAh couldn't help but be surprised. Not only that, but she only saw that Shin YuSung had slightly moved his hand.

"You blocked my electricity with a simple hand gesture? How did you do that?!"

YuSung was also surprised.

'It worked... '

It had worked flawlessly.

All of his senses had become a step sharper through [Heightened Focus].

'So this is the strength of the Thousand-Year-Old Jade... '

Shin YuSung's [Heightened Focus] couldn't be called an F-rank Trait anymore. Also, thanks to the strong body he'd obtained through training, he could use the entirety of its strength.

With a naturally-born strong body constitution, the strongest teacher, and a Trait that had been optimized for him, Student Shin YuSung was already stronger than a rank 5 hunter. After some real-life experience, there was a chance he might even be stronger than a rank 6 hunter.

'I've absorbed so much of the Thousand-Year-Old Jade's strength that I'm sure I'll be able to clear the 10th floor of the Tower... '

As Shin YuSung smiled while thinking about Kang YuChan's quest, Kim EunAh ran toward him.

"Hey! YuSung! How did you do that? Have you already reached a state where you can block an attack with a simple hand gesture?"

Such a thing required superhuman senses.

Although he'd created and used an entirely new technique, Shin YuSung spoke as if it were nothing.

"I just created a shockwave of the same wavelength to deflect the attack."

"A shockwave? What's that... Ah, don't tell me... Are you talking about Mana Resonance?"

"Yes."

Kim EunAh couldn't help but be surprised at Shin YuSung's calm answer.

"You freely triggered a Mana Resonance?"

"No. I cannot do it freely yet because I need to focus to do it. I need more training."

Kim EunAh was starting to feel a headache at Shin YuSung's answer.

"You sensed the wavelength of the skill and created a Mana Resonance? That's just a scam."

Kim EunAh had seen rank 7 hunters before, but Shin YuSung's Wave Resonance was something no other hunter had done.

'Just... '

Kim EunAh looked at Shin YuSung in surprise. She already knew it, but her party leader truly was someone who went beyond logic.

'How strong is he?'

Chapter 121

The EA Star Garden—Among the many residences of the Shinsung Group, it was the most luxurious. It was so big that hundreds of people managed the residence.

Even so, it was busier than it had ever been with almost 500 people going about their tasks. It was all thanks to the banquet that was going to take place the next day. As expected of the #1 business in the world, the banquet was set to be on an incredible scale.

"Hmm..." Kim EunAh watched them moving about through the window.

"Everyone's so busy~" Lee SuHyun saw EunAh covered in a sheen of nervous sweat.

"But~ Even still~ They probably aren't as busy as the secretary Lee SuHyun?" EunAh said to herself loudly as if she wanted SuHyun to listen.

"Ha, hahaha..." Lee SuHyun laughed awkwardly.

Kim EunAh kept talking. "You must talk casually~ You must betray me~ Pinch my lips~ Give me porridge to eat~ Haa, how busy~"

"M-miss? You know my feelings, right?" Even though she was older, Lee SuHyun made a heart with her fingers and tried to act cute.

Kim EunAh smirked. "Ahh... Well, it's okay."

Although EunAh was making fun of SuHyun, she was thankful to her because she'd helped her face Kim YunHa, her mother.

"My mother made you do that... Not only that, but in the end, you took my side." Kim EunAh was going through her memories when she

suddenly narrowed her eyes.

"But why did you pinch my lips? The more I think about it, the more annoyed I get."

"This will take about a month... ' Lee SuHyun thought, feeling nervous.

* * * *

Korea's Gaon Academy, Japan's Choten Academy, China's Skyscraper Academy, England's Clock Tower Academy... and many other academies were candidates to win the International Competition, but Italy wasn't one of them.

Compared to its size, Italy was a peaceful country where there weren't many gates and dungeons, which was why there weren't any other notable hunters besides Arden, who used to be called 'The Silver Wind'.

It just didn't seem possible for Italy to win the International Competition.

- Italy's Bianca Academy has won!

But then the story changed.

- It hasn't even been five minutes! What overwhelming ability!

Adela Ortensia, The Queen of Winter, Italy became a candidate to win thanks to the return of a single student.

'What the... '?' Leo looked at Adela, his mouth agape.

She'd dealt with three alone, and not only that, but Adela hadn't even used all of her strength.

"The estimated strength of the German team is 7th. Party leader Adela beat them alone." Leo mumbled while touching his glasses and gripping his book with one hand. "Just how strong is she...?"

Adela was the only student that had fought against Shin YuSung on equal terms. She was on a completely different level compared to the other candidates to win the International Competition.

Not only that, but after Adela lost to Shin YuSung, she started to make an effort for the first time in her life.

She'd spent up to 10 hours a day in a dungeon that could be handled only by active hunters.

Other students wouldn't have been able to handle her schedule, and Adela never complained while going through such harsh training.

'She looks like a doll with no emotions.'

That was Leo's honest opinion of Adela.

Even if Adela didn't interact with her partners, she was still strong.

The academy always talked about the importance of party dynamics, but she dealt with all of her opponents alone as if she were mocking that.

'If it's this person... '

The Sword God, The Fist King, The Witch...

She really might be able to defeat the monster disciples of the legends and give Italy their 1st win in the International Competition.

Leo could give Adela the entirety of the spotlight for that goal.

* * * *

[Shinsung Group's Banquet Invitation]

Within the Sevens' dormitories, Sumire looked at the hologram rising from her Pocket, a serious expression on her face.

'Shinsung Group's... Banquet... '

Although it had gotten better, when Sumire was little, she'd lived in a house that had trouble accessing drinking water. She was far away from the jaebol Shinsung Group.

In reality, Sumire didn't know that there was a banquet hall.

If it wasn't for EunAh's invitation, there was a chance that she wouldn't have known about it at all.

* * *

Sumire's expression hardened.

'I... I... To a place like this?'

Luxurious chandeliers, huge halls, and food she'd never seen before... Not only that, but people also wore expensive-looking suits and dresses. It was all a new world to her.

Slide.

Sumire looked at her closet. Rather than anything like a dress, all she could see were uniforms and casual clothes.

Slide.

She looked in the mirror. At the moment, she was wearing a big, comfortable T-shirt

'I cannot go to the banquet... in clothes I-like this'

If she went with a T-shirt, Sumire would probably be stopped from entering, but she couldn't go to the city at such a late hour.

To think she wouldn't be able to go to the banquet because she didn't have a dress—it was a Cinderella-like worry. At that moment, she heard a voice from Laplace's hair decoration.

- I can't watch any further.

" M-Ms. Laplace?"

- Haa... Extend your hand.

Laplace sighed, and then Sumire's hair accessory started to shine.

As Sumire extended her hand, a violet cloud covered her field of view, and the scenery changed.

There was a luxurious table, and Laplace was wearing a dress.

- I really can't stand looking at this.

Laplace looked at Sumire up and down with judging eyes; then she stood up and walked toward her.

- Do you want to look good in front of that YuSung boy?

"Yes? Yes?!"

Sumire didn't know how to react to the precise question; her face turned red.

"Y-you see..."

- Your appearance is similar to mine, but the core is the complete opposite.

As Laplace extended her hand, purple clouds started to gather around her.

Swoosh!

With Sumire getting used to the fragment, Laplace's mana had become stronger, and she was easily able to make small objects with her mana.

Pang!

"A t-tape measure...?"

As Sumire tilted her head in confusion, Laplace began to wrap the measuring tape around Sumire.

- Your size... I don't have to measure it to know we have a similar size, but still, it wouldn't hurt to measure it anyway.

"Ms. L-Laplace?!"

- Why are you so surprised? If someone saw us, they'd think I was about to devour you. Although your overflowing mana does look delicious...

Laplace licked her lips as she looked Sumire over.



"M-Ms. Laplace! It... it tickles!"

As the flustered Sumire tried to retreat, Laplace grabbed her waist tighter.

- Don't struggle. It will soon be over.

Slide!

Laplace smoothly took Sumire's measurements and mumbled to herself.

- As expected, your shell is truly similar to mine.

Laplace swung her hands through the air.

Swoosh!

The dress that Sumire really needed appeared in Laplace's grasp, and she handed it over, a smile on her face.

"Th-this..."

Sumire held the dress over her body—it was the perfect size.

"M-Ms. Laplace..."

As Sumire looked at her with a moved expression, Laplace made a motherly smile.

- My child, show your strength to the entire world...

"Ms. Laplace!"

Sumire teared up and hugged Laplace. The scene would have made even Cinderella's fairy godmother cry.

Chapter 122

People said that seven stars rose from the EA Star Garden.

In reality, they meant seven luxurious halls.

Kim EunAh was in the one only the most important VIPs could enter, the Alkaid Hall.

Entering the place was a huge honor for higher-standing people who had been invited to the banquet, but Kim EunAh hated gatherings like that.

'It's too boring... '

The banquet's primary goal was to solidify interpersonal relationships. People in Alkaid Hall approached Kim EunAh in a friendly manner despite the fact they hadn't seen each other before.

"Ms. EunAh, I heard that you're aiming to become a hunter... Even though you're the same age as me, you're quite impressive," a male student who was wearing clothes and accessories that added up to a couple million said.

But those things had no meaning to Kim EunAh. To be honest, Kim EunAh was bothered by the attention.

"Well, yes." As Kim EunAh answered in an uninterested way, the male student smiled awkwardly.

"Don't hunters have to risk their lives? To think you'd have such a strong mentality despite your beautiful looks... I really admire you." He smiled brightly.

"R... Really?" Kim EunAh did her best to maintain her expression.

'Did he eat butter? What's wrong with his way of speaking... '

When she saw him smiling, she remembered his name.

'Was his name Yang HanSeok...?

According to what she'd heard from Lee SuHyun, he was already receiving training as an heir.

He was completely different from her, who hated the position of heir. Maybe it was her prejudice, but Kim EunAh didn't like people like that.

"Our group is only famous in the car industry. To think that I'd be able to share a place with Miss EunAh, the heir of the Shinsung Group..."

Yang HanSeok seemed happy to have been invited to the Alkaid Hall, but that was because of Kim SeokHan. Kim EunAh had nothing to do with it.

'What's so impressive about a place like this...?'

The Alkaid Hall, which was decorated with gold and jewels, didn't impress Kim EunAh. That was also the case for the important people that had been invited there.

For Kim EunAh, they were all boring. She liked other things such as city cafes, sleeping in tents, hand-made curry, and doing rock-paper-scissors to decide who would clean the clubroom.

The world was full of fun and enjoyable things.

"Ah, Miss EunAh, if you have some time, do you want to join our reunion? Even among social gatherings, we've carefully..."

The moment Kim EunAh saw Yang HanSeok's eyes, she knew he wasn't interested in her as a person but in her position as heir of the Shinsung Group. He wanted to use her to increase his social standing.

She knew it better than anyone else because she also used to be like that, but she was tired of it.

'When are they coming...?'

Kim EunAh sighed and took a glimpse over Alkaid Hall. Yang HanSeok didn't stop trying to convince her to go to his social gathering.

"If Miss EunAh comes, I'm sure the other members will also be happy..."

"Ah!" Kim EunAh suddenly raised her hands and smiled.

"YuSung! Over here!" Without thinking about her standing, Kim EunAh waved her hand and looked over at YuSung, who was wearing a suit.

EunAh, who was almost like the protagonist of the banquet, was focused on Shin YuSung.

"M-miss EunAh?" Yang HanSeok tried to talk to her, but Kim EunAh ignored him.

"Why are you so late? I've been waiting for a while! Mom and Grandfather have been waiting for you!"

Yang HanSeok was shocked at EunAh's words.

'Th-the chairman was looking for him?!'

Chairman Kim SeokHan was on an entirely different level from Kim EunAh, the heir. He had huge power. On top of that, EunAh's mother, YunHa, was the CEO of the Shinsung Group. To think that those two people were looking for Shin YuSung, a student.

There was only one thing he could think of...

'I thought she hung out with commoners just for fun. So, th-that wasn't

the case?'

Yang HanSeok imagined it to be for a bride-and-groom family meeting.

Not knowing what HanSeok was thinking, Kim EunAh began talking to Shin YuSung while making an excited face.

"I mentioned you liked sweet things, so they ended up ordering a huge amount of Bella chocolate."

"Bella chocolate?"

"Yes. It's quite an expensive chocolate that they make only a limited amount of, but they made a huge fondue fountain of it..."

Yang HanSeok as he watched Kim EunAh and Shin YuSung.

'That guy... '

Although he was loath to admit it, after he saw Shin YuSung's face, Yang HanSeok had no other option.

The students in Alkaid Hall did not even care for famous people, but Shin YuSung's beauty was enough to even grab attention from the female students who were used to such gatherings.

Yang HanSeok frowned. 'How dare a poor person whose only redeeming quality is his face look at the Shinsung Group... '

It was clear that he was jealous.

Kim EunAh, the heir of the Shinsung Group, was like a modern equivalent to royalty. That's why, if he managed to become engaged to Kim EunAh, he could stop worrying about his brothers competing with him.

EunAh was even a bigger prize than the lottery to a jaebol like Yang HanSeok, but he hadn't lusted over her too much due to just how big

of a fish she was.

What he wanted was to get to know Kim EunAh, but she was smiling at YuSung.

"Let's go see it! Chocolate is coming out as if it were a fountain. It's as if they'd bought it for you."

A mere hunter...

When he thought that a mere student like YuSung was receiving Kim EunAh's affection, he became jealous.

'He's someone who's going to be under a guild working as a hunter at best... He probably went to the International Competition because he had a good teacher.

Tap.

At that moment, someone placed their hands on Yang HanSeok's shoulders.

"I know what you're feeling... but stop."

Yang HanSeok turned his head and saw Park SuHyun, who was making an expression that made it seem like he knew it all.

"You..."

Slide.

Park SuHyun used his middle finger to adjust his glasses and gave him honest advice based on his experience.

"You shouldn't get involved with him..."

* * *

A giant fountain that streamed chocolate instead of water.

Chocolate flowed out of a sculpture made of stainless steel at its apex.

"The chocolate is flowing out like a waterfall..." YuSung exclaimed in surprise.

Thanks to Lee SiWoo's help, Shin YuSung had tasted delivery food, but the Star Garden's chocolate fountain was completely new territory for him.

"How about that? It's the first time you've seen something like this, right?"

Kim EunAh seemed proud when she saw YuSung's reaction. She grabbed a stick cookie and covered it with chocolate.

Crunch.

"Ou can ea ih ike this."

Following her example, Shin YuSung grabbed a stick cookie with a marshmallow on it.

As he used his long fingers to spin the stick cookie, chocolate covered the marshmallow, and YuSung gave it a serious expression.

Crunch.

The sweet taste of the marshmallow spread through his mouth; the taste of the best Alps milk and the highest quality cacao butter followed.

The chocolate fountain was an extreme show of wealth.

"D-delicious..."

YuSung's eyes opened wide in surprise. Compared to the 12 years he'd spent in the mountains, it hadn't been long since he began living in the city.

He felt that the fatigue that had been building while preparing for the International Competition was melting away all at once.

'As expected... there are many things I still don't know.'

YuSung looked at the chocolate fountain with a serious expression. Kim EunAh kept explaining the different foods one could find to YuSung.

"Hehe~ Your eyes got so wide~ It's delicious~ right?! Oh, yeah. That caviar cracker is also very delicious!"

As Kim EunAh tried to drag Shin YuSung away to taste new things, they heard familiar voices coming from a distance.

- There's chocolate coming from that fountain...

- What an unsophisticated reaction~! That's called a fondue~ I already tried it on TV~

The two's voices couldn't be mistaken.

"These voices..."

Kim EunAh narrowed her eyes and looked beyond the fountain to see Sumire and Amy.

"Huh?!"

"M-Miss EunAh?"

Amy waved her hand when she saw YuSung and EunAh.

"Party leader! EunAh! I missed you! I've been looking for you!"

"M-me too...! I also wanted to see you, YuSung!"



In contrast to her timid way of speaking, Sumire was wearing quite a daring dress. Seeing that the dress had Laplace's hair accessory, guessing who had recommended it wasn't that hard.

"Is there a need to search? It's just a house."

"Come on... People don't usually call a 330,000 square-meter building a house."

Maybe it was because they were both in the A class, but EunAh and Amy seemed close despite arguing so much.

On the other hand, Sumire was just looking at YuSung.

"Uhm, Y-YuSung..."

Sumire shyly played with her fingers, looked at Shin YuSung's face, and gathered her courage.

"C-could we talk a bit...?"

Chapter 123

If Alkaid Hall was a place for select VIPs, Alioth Hall was where they'd gathered delicious food from around the world.

Kim EunAh brought Shin YuSung a dessert, but he was nowhere to be seen.

"Huh? Where's YuSung?" Kim EunAh asked in confusion.

"I don't know. Maybe he went out a little bit?" Amy, who had already fallen for the food, gave her an uninterested answer.

"But I picked out and brought food for him..."

EunAh looked at the beef Wellington on the plate she'd brought for YuSung, who really liked meat. Not only that but there was also tiramisu—the first dessert he'd tasted at the cafe.

"Haa... This lobster is crazy. I feel like my tongue is about to melt..." Amy fussed as she continued to eat the food.

EunAh continued to look for YuSung, but he was still nowhere to be seen after five minutes of searching.

'When is he coming?'

Kim EunAh absently scratched the plate with a fork.

"Haa... I'd like to eat like this every day. Ah, EunAh! Can I taste that tiramisu?" Amy said, her mouth full of food.

Amy eyed the tiramisu, her eyes shining, but EunAh was feeling a bit annoyed at YuSung's absence.

"No. I'm going to eat it all, so get one yourself."

It was too much to eat alone, but still, EunAh ate a spoon of it.

The soft sensation of cream, cheese, and coffee powder spread through her mouth.

A familiar scent remained on EunAh's nose.

'What's this smell...?'

The smell was kahlúa—alcohol made with a variant of arabica coffee was in the tiramisu.

Crunch.

'It's really delicious... Although there isn't anything he doesn't eat, he's definitely going to like this.'

Kim EunAh took another spoon of tiramisu and thought about how YuSung always ordered tiramisu when he went to a cafe.

'He doesn't like coffee because it's too bitter... Yet he likes coffee cake.'

From what Kim EunAh had seen, YuSung favored sweet things.

'Who eats tiramisu with banana milk in a cafe...?'

Crunch.

'Stupid... Besides tiramisu and banana milk... there are many other delicious desserts from around the world... '

Kim EunAh sighed and ate another spoonful of tiramisu.

* * * *

The night sky could be seen from Alkaid Hall's terrace. Sumire gave

YuSung a serious look before she opened her mouth to speak.

"I got this message earlier today, but I feel like I need to show it to you, YuSung."

"A message?" YuSung asked.

Sumire nodded and touched her Pocket.

Paf!

A name YuSung was familiar with appeared.

[Club Application Form]

[Club Name - Hunter's Club]

[Leader - 2nd-year S-class Shin HaYoon]

Shin HaYoon...

YuSung frowned when he read the name. There wasn't anyone in the Academy that didn't know that Sumire was part of Shin YuSung's party, yet HaYoon had sent something like that.

It was too lowly to even call it a provocation.

Also, one could easily see what Shin HaYoon was after just by glancing at the contract.

[Hunter Contract]

[Client - Shin HaYoon]

[Target - Hanajima Sumire]

[Detail - Admin Shin HaYoon will pay 100K USD every month for six months in total.]

[Detail 2 - If the contract is accepted, you'll have to do nine requests every month (rank 4 or lower).]

* * *

Kim EunAh didn't have any needs in terms of money, and Amy was also from a wealthy family, so she'd targeted Sumire.

With HaYoon's influence and Sumire's improved skills, it wouldn't be hard to earn more than the contract specified.

That aside, it was clear that wasn't HaYoon's real goal. If she wanted to give her nine jobs a month, that meant that she wanted to make Sumire leave YuSung's party.

"This..."

Shin YuSung's expression hardened. 100K USD every month... 600K in six months—It was an amount of money that only a guild could afford.

Despite HaYoon being a student, she was administering the club in a legal yet aggressive way.

YuSung hadn't realized the weight of money at first, but that wasn't the case anymore.

100K USD was too much of a temptation for someone like Sumire, who was helping her family.

Sumire tugged on the ends of her sleeves.

"Uhm, YuSung...?" She was wondering how she would convey her thoughts to YuSung and decided to say it directly. "I heard... about your and the student council president's relation..."

Maybe it was because she was lacking in self-confidence after the incident, but it was easy for her to pick up on things like that.

"You don't have a good relationship. Right? That's why the student council president..." Sumire carefully asked.

Shin YuSung nodded. "Yes. She wants to separate us, after all."

Shin HaYoon had clearly said that she would get Shin YuSung. She'd said that she'd give him the best treatment and requested that he return to the family.

That wasn't something YuSung could do. He wasn't training so hard to return to the family or serve as HaYoon's underling, after all.

What he wanted was to prove his worth as the disciple of Fist King Yu WonHak and to test his worth and limits as a hunter. In order to achieve that, his goal was to become the strongest, and that was also why he didn't intend to serve under someone.

As complex emotions became apparent on YuSung's face, Sumire grabbed his right hand with both hands.

It was something that the previous Sumire wouldn't have dared to do, and YuSung was surprised at the unexpected gesture.

"Sumire...?"

He felt the warmth emanating from her hands.

Sumire looked up at him and said, "YuSung..." with a serious look in her eyes.

It was the first time she had looked at him in such a way.

"You can rely on me a bit more... if you're struggling with something."

YuSung was trying to solve the problems that Shin HaYoon created to bother him. Besides that, he'd never shown Sumire his weak side.

For Sumire, YuSung was always strong, and she admired him.

"I'm... not as strong as you, YuSung... and I'm also not as intelligent... so I'm not sure if I could be helpful." Sumire gathered courage and kept talking. "But still... I want to at least listen to your worries."

Her courage only lasted for a moment, and her face reddened as she became aware of YuSung's stare.

"B-because... we're p-party members!" Sumire quickly let his hands go.

"Yes. Thank you, Sumire." YuSung gave her a soft smile, and she gazed back at him with a blank expression.

Three seconds of silence passed.

Surprised, it took her a few moments to return to her senses. "Ah! I... I...! I want to stay in your party, YuSung!" she quickly added.

Her rushed reply and honest appearance made YuSung's worries vanish.

"Even if they gave me a couple of million... I want to stay in this party..." Sumire suddenly stopped talking and lowered her face. "That's why... you don't need to worry about this proposal."

He felt as if a heavy weight had disappeared and was about to say something when...

Slide-

The terrace door opened.

Tap! Tap!

He heard footsteps approaching and a weird laugh.

"He... Hehe."

Paf!

Someone hugged Shin YuSung.

"Our~ YuSung~ So you were here?"

"M-Miss EunAh?!"

Sumire's eyes widened. It appeared that EunAh had gotten drunk off of the tiramisu.

"E-EunAh?" YuSung asked in surprise.

Kim EunAh, drunk, jumped up from behind and grabbed Shin YuSung's cheeks.

"You cutie~ Where were you?"

EunAh, smiling mischievously, was the first person at the banquet who had gotten drunk off of a traditional tiramisu.



Chapter 124

Kim EunAh, drunk from the tiramisu, ambushed them on the terrace.

"E-EunAh?" Shin YuSung smiled in surprise as she pulled his cheek.

EunAh nodded, a blush forming on her face. "Yes~ What~?"

The Kalua in the tiramisu had an average alcohol percentage of about 20~26%, which was much higher than soju. Despite that, the alcohol went through so many processes while it was being cooked into the tiramisu that it wasn't enough to get most people drunk. Unfortunately, EunAh had a low tolerance for alcohol.

"M-Ms. EunAh! If... if you pull YuSung's cheeks!" Sumire seemed so worried about YuSung's cheeks that she was about to cry.

Even though EunAh was wearing a dress, she'd jumped onto YuSung's back and looked a bit like a koala on their mother's back.

"Ms. EunAh! If you do that, you might show something indecent!" Sumire yelled in surprise and tried to adjust EunAh's dress.

It seemed like Kim EunAh thought that Sumire was trying to make her come down, so she shook her head. "No! No! No... I don't wanna! Let me join..."

It was their first time seeing EunAh act like that.

"Yes! We'll let you join!" Sumire quickly answered when she noticed EunAh was drunk.

EunAh buried her face in YuSung's back and peeked at Sumire. "Really...?"

"Yes! Of course!"

"I was... sad. I brought dessert... but you two weren't there..."

Maybe it was because she was drunk, but EunAh was speaking her honest feelings.

Sumire used the experience she'd gained while taking care of her dongsengs. "Yes?! That's not the case at all! We planned to return to you after we finished talking!

"Really...?"

"Yes! Really!"

EunAh finally let YuSung's neck go and lowered herself from his back. "You know~ I really~ really like you guys!" she affectionately expressed.

She was saying stuff she wouldn't normally say.

'C-cute... ' Sumire felt her heart warm as she looked at EunAh.

"I... also really~ like Ms. EunAh!" Sumire also expressed her affection toward EunAh while opening her arms for a hug.

"Hehe, really? Why~?"

It had a great effect, and EunAh's attention was soon on Sumire as she jumped into Sumire's embrace and began moving her head up and down.

"Why~ do you like me? Hmm~ because I'm pretty~?" EunAh tried to act cute and looked up at Sumire, who quickly began praising her.

"U-unlike me! Ms. EunAh, you're very confident in yourself! And you're pretty... and cool... and you're our party member!"

EunAh's eyes widened, and it seemed like Sumire's words moved her.

"Ah, yeah... party members..." Kim EunAh hugged Sumire. "Hey,

guys... you mustn't kick me out... let's stay together forever~."

The drunken EunAh was showing her weak side, and Sumire firmly accepted her words. "That's obvious! We'll be together forever, no matter what!

Kim EunAh and Sumire had confirmed their friendship as party members. YuSung fell into thought as he watched EunAh's childish behavior.

'So it's because of what happened in Japan... '

EunAh had suddenly been unable to participate in the International Competition. Shin YuSung had never blamed her, but she'd been feeling guilty about it due to her personality.

'EunAh is more detail-oriented than I expected... '

Although EunAh looked strong at first glance, the truth was that it was all acting.

She acted strong, she acted as if she weren't lonely, and she acted as if it didn't matter...

But rather than being as cool as a cat, EunAh's true personality was closer to a rabbit that suffered a lot from loneliness.

'Is... In reality, is Sumire better with things like this?'

Sumire's self-confidence had increased after the incident in Japan, and the fact she'd won against Isshin was proof of that. As the party leader, YuSung always considered how his party members could grow.

'Since she's an important member... it's important that EunAh's mood returns to normal as quickly as possible.'

That's why, for YuSung, it was better for EunAh to leave her emotional baggage behind as quickly as possible. It was all to win the International Competition and increase their fighting capability.

Shin YuSung fell into thought. 'I planned the climbing schedule with EunAh and Sumire in mind, so if the face collapses... it will be troublesome.'

YuSung suddenly decided to climb the Tower because of a message he got from Mei Lin.

[(Mei-Lin): The Association President has sent student Shin YuSung entrance permission.]

[(Mei-Lin): It would be better to check it out yourself.]

Ting! Paf!

As Shin YuSung checked the message through the Pocket, a document-type hologram appeared.

[Tower Entrance Permission]

[1st Goal: 10th Floor]

[Allowed number of people: 5]

[※ Attention: If the 1st goal is fulfilled, the Administrator must verify.]

* * *

He received Tower entrance permission from Mei Lin. With that, he could enter the Tower with a party of five.

Of course, since Lee SiWoo had begun individual training, he only had four members available, and if Amy was busy with streaming, the number decreased to three.

In the worst-case scenario, Shin YuSung might have to climb the Tower with only Kim EunAh and Sumire.

'Of course EunAh and Sumire became stronger... but still, it would be

better if things were as balanced as possible.'

YuSung was deep in thought, and EunAh glared at him.

"YuSung, you... just now! You were thinking of something serious, right? If you keep doing that... I'll pinch you again!"

After Kim EunAh threatened him, she walked toward one of the terrace's corners and sat on a chair.

Tap.

Kim EunAh slapped the chair while looking at Sumire and Shin YuSung.

Pang, pang!

"Stupid... On a day like today, you can take a break. Thinking about serious things is forbidden!"

Tap-

After saying that, Kim EunAh touched her Pocket, and plates with food started to appear.

"W-woah... Ms. EunAh, did you bring all of these on your own?"

It surprised Sumire. Kim EunAh was like a modern princess, so when she considered EunAh's usual personality, it wasn't something she would usually imagine her doing.

"Yes! Fufu, I did well, right?"

EunAh lowered her head as if asking them to praise her.

'C-cute... '

Sumire's slowly reached out her arm as if she were finding it hard to hold back and patted EunAh on the head.

"Well done~ Good job~"

"Hehehe~ It was nothing~" Excited at Sumire's praise, EunAh grabbed a biscuit.

"I'm going to feed you, Sumire, ah~" EunAh fed Sumire a biscuit, and Sumire ate it with a smile on her face.

"It's delicious!" Sumire exclaimed.

EunAh looked at Shin YuSung. "YuSung likes sweets, so a choco chip cookie! YuSung~ Ah~"

"O-okay..."

YuSung opened his mouth while making a troubled expression from being treated like a kid. EunAh shook her head and bounced on the chair.

"No-! YuSung, open your moth more~ Ah~"

In the end, YuSung opened his mouth.

It seemed like that finally satisfied EunAh, and she fed him a choco chip cookie.

"It's delicious, right?" EunAh's face was still red, and a smile stretched across her face.

An hour passed like that.

"Ahh... EunAh fell asleep."

YuSung continued to eat his cookie and looked down at EunAh.



"Ung... Hehe... Orca~" EunAh mumbled in her sleep from Sumire's lap/

Sumire made YuSung eat more quietly and mumbled in a low voice,

"I'll ensure she doesn't wake up... and carefully take her to the dormitories."

Sumire had the death knights and Lilith, so moving the lightweight Kim EunAh was easy for her.

"Sumire, are you okay?"

Sumire nodded at Shin YuSung's question.

"Tomorrow is the weekend anyway." She looked at EunAh with kind eyes.

Then...

BZZ.

YuSung's Pocket started to vibrate from an incoming message.

[June: Long time no see, little brother. Could we talk for a moment?]

It was an unknown nickname, but after YuSung read the message, his expression hardened.

[June: I have something to say in place of your noona.]

"This person... "

They were one of the members of the Shin-oh family.



Chapter 125

After he finished speaking with the guests in Alkaid Hall, Kim SeokHan laughed out loud. "Hahaha! As expected, our SungHan married an amazing person. To think he'd bring someone as intelligent and pretty as you," he said to Kim YunHa.

As SeokHan laughed and praised her, YunHa lowered her head and tried to act humble. "I'm still lacking, yet you view me in such a positive light, so I'm thankful for that. Fufu. And he usually... treats me really well..."

Kim SeokHan nodded and looked at the empty place next to him. Kim EunAh's father, Kim SungHan, couldn't be there due to his busy schedule.

It was too bad.

SeokHan put down his cup and spoke in a heavy voice. "I heard about EunAh... I understand your feelings, but I think you hurried things too much."

"I'm sorry." As YunHa lowered her head, SeokHan waved his hand.

"No! It's okay. I do understand your and SungHan's emotions. The world of hunters is too much for someone like EunAh..."

Although he was focusing on managing the Shinsung Group, SeokHan was a legend in the hunter world, and he was more aware of the dangers a hunter faced than anyone else in the Shinsung Group.

SeokHan took a sip of wine. "But still... I want to support that kid in every possible way."

SeokHan recalled his past. He had been more passionate about the hunter job than anyone else, and his thoughts only changed when he

passed his mid-twenties.

What the world needed... wasn't just hunters.

SeokHan had accepted being the heir of the Shinsung Group and made the company what it was, and the Shinsung Group was famous worldwide.

Even so, SeokHan always regretted giving up on his dream of being a hunter, which was why he was more satisfied than anyone else when he'd seen EunAh's work as a hunter.

"You're EunAh's mother, so I'll leave things to you. If it's you, I'm sure you'll be able to make the correct decision."

Still, SeokHan left the choice to YunHa. Although he was called 'cold-blooded', he was warm when it came to his family.

"Yes... Understood."

At YunHa's answer, SeokHan called Lee SuHyun. "Secretary Lee SuHyun, where's EunAh? Haha. Maybe it's because I'm old, but I cannot hold back my desire to see our cute EunAh," he said and laughed.

YunHa laughed in kind and covered her mouth. "Fufu, of course, father. Although she's my daughter, she's really lovely."

The atmosphere turned nice thanks to the topic of EunAh.

SuHyun felt someone approaching them and quickly said, "The Miss is entering."

"Hahaha! I wonder how long it's been since I last saw her. Everyone, it seems like our EunAh is about to enter!" As President Kim SeokHan began talking, everyone else's chatter stopped.

"I heard she's done a great job in the hunter world."

"Not only that, but she looks like the CEO, so she's really beautiful..."

"Haha! I hope my sons also give me grandchildren. President, I'm envious!"

"I also started to insist on grandchildren when I saw EunAh."

All of the guests were flattering his family, and Kim SeokHan, who was starting to feel good, laughed brightly. "That isn't something that can happen just because you insist on it! Hahaha!"

Laughter filled the banquet hall, but their faces stiffened when they heard EunAh's voice in the distance.

"YuSung~ I~ I'm sorry for bringing you by force, but still~ I'm going to give you a lot of delicious food!"

EunAh was stuck in YuSung's arms and was dragging him along.

"E... EunAh?" SeokHan seemed flustered.

'Why's she drunk?'

Secretary Lee SuHyun was dripping in a nervous sweat. YunHa had prohibited anyone from serving anything with alcohol to EunAh, but none of them knew that the tiramisu was the culprit.

"Grandfather~ Hi~ Here's my first...? First? First! Partner!"

EunAh presented YuSung and nodded. SeokHan's reaction was complex, and he had a benevolent expression on his face as he looked at EunAh.

"Grandfather~ YuSung is cute, right?"

That benevolent expression turned scary when he looked at YuSung.

"Th-this... This bastard!"

"EunAh, my cheeks..."

Still, EunAh was expressing her affection to YuSung as if she wanted SeokHan to look at them.

"Hehe... Soft."

Everyone else just stared at the two, laughing as they covered their mouths at EunAh's sudden action and lightening the atmosphere.

"EunAh~ You wanted to present student YuSung to grandfather, right?"

EunAh shook her head. "Hmm? Rather than that, I wanted him to taste the delicious food..."

EunAh grabbed a fork and gave some food on the table to YuSung.

Crunch-

'It's delicious... '

Despite all the people looking at him, YuSung still ate the food EunAh gave him. The foods on the table were of a different quality compared to what YuSung was used to.

Nothing was strongly flavored like delivery food, and it wasn't that things had been affectionately cooked like Sumire's food was.

Rather, the best chefs in the world had cooked everything with the best possible ingredients—each dish was like a work of art.

"This duck meat... The exterior is crunchy, and the interior is soft. What's this transparent thing inside the soup?"

They were all new flavors to YuSung.

SeokHan glared at him.

'Our EunAh isn't the type of person who would act like that...!'

EunAh had never acted like that toward a family member, but her tiramisu-fueled drunkenness was having her act in a cute manner.

'Just what did YuSung do?'

SeokHan was burning with envy.

EunAh grabbed food for YuSung, a smile on her face.

"YuSung~ You're eating the food I'm giving you~ You look like a baby bird."

"EunAh, the food here is really delicious."

YuSung exclaimed in surprise at the food's flavor, and EunAh looked happy at his comment.

"Really? Then~ should I ask them to make more? Grandfather, is that okay?"

Whish-

EunAh turned her head.

"O-okay. Ask for as much as you want." SeokHan nodded while making a serious expression, but he couldn't control it for long.

'That kid... Even though her father is here... Fufu.'

YunHa was laughing at EunAh.

'I heard from secretary Lee SuHyun that she got drunk off of the tiramisu... but this kid is really lacking.'

Whether it was friendship or love, EunAh was obsessive. Even her mother, YunHa, wasn't sure of EunAh's feelings toward YuSung, but it was clear to her that she placed great importance on him.

Instead of her usual, cold, businesswoman voice, YunHa called YuSung's name with a warm mother's voice. YuSung turned his head to her.

"I'm sorry for what happened last time. I did it because I was worried for EunAh as her parent, so I hope you haven't taken it personally."

EunAh forced herself into the conversation and nodded. "That's right. You were too mean. You locked me up... and pinched my lips..."

"M-miss?! Here! It's a new menu!" That time, it was SuHyun who stopped EunAh short.

[Ugh!]

[Stop complaining and eat... Tomorrow, I'll go with you to talk to your mother.]

SuHyun having pinched Kim EunAh's lip was a secret among secrets.

'Has she lost her mind?! Does she want me to die?!'

It would be the end of her if SeokHan and YunHa found out.

"Ah, an extra menu... YuSung said he was hungry. Put it in front of him!"

Thankfully, Kim EunAh tapped on the table. It seemed like she'd already forgotten what she wanted to say.

YunHa smiled softly at YuSung.

"I hope you take good care of our EunAh..."

As EunAh's mother, it was like she was saying that she accepted YuSung as her daughter's party member and that she would leave her safety in his hands.

"Yes. EunAh is my forever party member. That's why... I will take care

of her as if her life is my own," YuSung replied in a serious manner while looking at EunAh.

It was a heartwarming scene.

"Ehem! Hmm..." SeokHan still seemed uncomfortable as he looked at YuSung. It was understandable.

To him, YuSung was the one who had robbed his granddaughter from him. Every time he saw EunAh being affectionate toward him, he felt his insides burning.

"Forever? You're using some grand words. Listen carefully. In life, there's nothing that's guaranteed." SeokHan's eyes were completely different from when he looked at EunAh.

"That's why I don't like people who use words like 'forever' or 'a hundred percent'..."

"Hmm? Grandfather, but I'll be YuSung's party member forever~"

Once again, EunAh joined the conversation.

YunHa, Lee SuHyun, and the other guests were trying their best to hold in their laughter.

"Ha, haha... EunAh, what Grandfather wanted to say is that there's nothing guaranteed in life~ so you should take time to think about things~"

"Yes, but still... I... like people to say things directly. I'm happy when people are direct and honest..." EunAh once again smiled as she touched YuSung's cheeks.

"R-really? O-okay. EunAh, now that I think about it, as your grandfather... I seem to have been mistaken."

In the end, SeokHan surrendered to EunAh's smile. All the beliefs he'd cultivated throughout his life collapsed at his granddaughter's cute smile.

'EunAh has complete control of the president... '

'To think he receives such trust from EunAh.'

'It seems like it will be worth building a connection with that student... I'll send someone.'

Thanks to that, all the important people that had gathered from around the world started to look at Shin YuSung, who was still a student, with great interest.

'I knew it... To think that someone from an unknown family would... dare to take our EunAh... Ugh.' SeokHan was suffering because someone had taken his granddaughter from him.

'Haa. I barely managed to stop her from saying it... I almost died today.' Lee SuHyun was feeling relieved.

"Fufu. Since everyone's finished their greetings... should we start the ceremony?" YunHa organized the situation with a smile.

With Shin YuSung and Kim EunAh participating, the Shinsung Group's banquet became more lively.

* * *

Tap, tap.

Unlike the lively atmosphere of the banquet hall, his steps were calm.



As a member of the Shin-oh family, YuWol had sent a message to Shin YuSung and tried to meet up with him, but that was just his surface reason.

He had another goal.

'Even that got screwed up... '

Tap.

YuWol sat at a table in the corner where two foreign men and women waited.

"So, how did it go?"

The first to open their mouth was a brown-haired girl. She seemed to be Eastern European.

Although she looked to be in her late teens, she was talking comfortably to YuWol.

"Please, read this message."

On the other hand, YuWol talked to her with respect.

Paf-

[June: Long time no see, little brother. Could we talk for a moment?]

It was an unknown nickname, but after YuSung read the message, his expression hardened.

[June: I have something to say in place of your noona.]

[Shin YuSung: I have nothing to say.]

"Woah, sharp answer. This kid... It seems like he's quite angry toward your family."

Although she seemed to be a teenager herself, she referred to YuSung as a 'kid'. The man next to her, wearing glasses, murmured in a disappointed voice. "Although we took the time to come... It seems like even making simple contact will be hard for the time being."

"I'm sorry, leader." YuWol lowered his head.

The man wearing the glasses quickly waved his hands. "No. Don't say sorry, YuWol. There's nothing you could've done about it. We'll be satisfied today with just having breathed some fresh air."

The man wearing the glasses got up, and the brown-haired girl followed.

She took three steps and stopped. YuWol looked at her with emotionless eyes, and the girl spoke. "Oh, yeah... they said that Cheat was released."

It was a secret that an average person wouldn't have access to, but the girl mentioned it as if it were nothing.

"Thanks for your effort."

"Me? What effort? The one who made the effort was your donseng who grabbed Cheat." YuWol saluted both cordially.

The brown-haired girl left with a smile.

Those three people who didn't seem to have anything in common at first glance were hiding identities none could have imagined.

Chapter 126

The day after the banquet...

While most students were taking a break, YuSung traveled somewhere quite unexpected—the Hunter Association's Academy City Branch.

It was a place where only those who were the best among countless students who aspired to be hunters could go.

"It seems that we've seen each other two days in a row now... To think that I'd meet with a student this often. I feel like we might get friendlier at this rate."

As Mei Lin greeted him with a smile, YuSung also smiled at her.

That alone proved that he'd gotten close to Mei Lin, who had always kept a professional relationship with him before.

"Set portal G-3's destination to the Tower. There's no need for an escort—I'll follow them personally," she ordered in a familiar tone of voice.

"Yes! Understood!" After a short reply, the nearby personnel activated the portal.

Whir!

Before they entered the portal, Mei Lin began warning YuSung of a few things he had to be cautious about.

"Student Shin YuSung, you're strong. You'll probably have an easy time clearing the lower floors, but there are a few things you should be careful about." Before she could continue with her warnings, she stopped.

Mei Lin really liked people who were prepared. YuSung had gained her interest after she'd seen how much he'd prepared for the water dragon, after all.

'Don't tell me it's the same this time too?'

Mei Lin looked YuSung in the face and asked, "Student Shin YuSung, do you know the three things one has to be careful of on the lower floors?"

At Mei Lin's question, Shin YuSung fell into thought.

'Variables that happen on the lower floors...?'

There were too many variables on the Tower because, after all, everything that was inside the Tower was a variable.

Even if two people cleared the 30th floor, depending on the time, they might end up facing different stages. One didn't know when the stage would change, the rewards were randomized, and the quest goals always changed, so the Tower wasn't a place you could predict.

'Nothing that special happens on the lower floors.'

The Tower didn't even have quests until the 10th floor. Rather, the lower floors only required you to clear them—you just had to defeat the monsters the Tower wanted you to.

'Still, we are talking about the Tower... There's a difference between the monsters.'

Shin YuSung tried to remember what Yu WonHak had taught him.

[YuSung, the Tower... It changes a lot, so you have to be careful. Always. And don't forget to look around.]

[Yes!]

Yu WonHak had always emphasized three things.

"If you're talking about three things, they're probably hidden monsters, champion bosses, and hidden stages."

Mei Lin made a satisfied smile at his answer. "Correct. What's the difference between a hidden monster and a champion boss?"

It seemed like Mei Lin wasn't satisfied with his answer, so she demanded an explanation, but that at least meant that his answer had caught her attention.

Shin YuSung opened his mouth confidently. "Hidden monsters are extremely strong monsters that might appear in a non-related floor. You could call that a variable, but champion bosses are different."

"Your explanation on hidden monsters was perfect. Fufu, what about champion bosses?" Mei Lin asked with a smile.

Shin YuSung immediately began explaining. "When a normal boss fulfills certain conditions, it evolves. The result of its evolution changes depending on the place and conditions, and that's why you never know how they will look. That's an extremely rare case. There have only been 20 such reported cases beneath the 10th floor."

It was a perfect, textbook answer.

To put it simply, a hidden monster was when a monster way stronger than the others appeared out of the blue.

On the other hand, champion bosses were when a normal boss became stronger for some special reason.

As Shin YuSung finished explaining, Mei Lin clapped. "That was a perfect explanation. Only student Sumire had high marks regarding theory, so I didn't have much in the way of expectation..."

Mei Lin began explaining 'hidden stages'.

* * *

"Hidden stages happen when you're transported to a space that isn't

the original destination. Since one doesn't know what might happen, we suggest retreating... But student Shin YuSung, you know about this already, right?"

"There are cases where portals don't work, and there are a few places without warp stones." With that, YuSung answered all questions.

Mei Lin made a satisfied expression. "To think that you already knew everything despite being a student... As expected, there's a reason why the President cares so much for you."

Mei Lin praising someone was a rare occurrence.

"You've over-praising me. There are still many things that I'm not aware of."

As YuSung gave a humble smile, Mei Lin placed her chin on the back of her hand and stared at him.

'He's a good person, smart, handsome, and even strong? He's really the type of person who will be liked no matter where he goes.'

Mei Lin wasn't after Shin YuSung because Fist King Yu WonHak and Association President Kang YuChan were already eyeing him. Although she was a rank 6 hunter, she couldn't compete with them.

Swoosh!

It seemed like the preparations were over. The portal began emitting blue light. After Mei Lin checked the portal's destination, she guided YuSung.

"Once you pass through the portal, you'll find yourself on the 1st floor. You'll be entering with me this time."

Swish!

Mei Lin walked into the portal first; YuSung clenched his fists and prepared his heart.

'I wonder how the Tower looks.'

YuSung had only heard about the Tower through stories, and the one who told him those stories was obviously his master, Yu WonHak.

[You'll feel how many hunters are around the world just by going to the first floor!]

[You'll realize how much stronger you have to become!]

While thinking about Yu WonHak's laugh, YuSung walked through the portal.

Swoosh!

He had high hopes for the unknown territory.

As he walked out of the portal, a scene YuSung would have never imagined unfolded before him.

"A hunter that wants to clear the 8th floor? The Italian here speaks Korean well! We have one place left! Quick!"

"Andiamo e basta. (Let's just go)."

A Korean woman and Italian men sought members to clear the Tower.

[Hunter Equipment Repair/Buy/Sell!]

[Magic Stone Exchange]

[Hunting Commission (Rank 3 ~ 5)]

There were all sorts of shops. The 1st floor of the Tower looked like a giant plaza or a market.

"This is the Tower...?" Shin YuSung looked around in surprise.

"It isn't always like this, but most of the time, it is. This is where the journey starts, after all." Mei Lin began pointing to the shops. "Hunters that don't want to use their money on the portal often re-equip on the 1st floor. They can get things repaired here, and they also sleep in the lodgings."

"I see..."

"And to start the journey up the Tower, you have to use the warp stone at the reception area."

Mei Lin took Shin YuSung to the reception area and gave the guide Kang YuChan's permit.

After they checked the permit, the guide smiled at them. Mei Lin looked at Shin YuSung and asked, "You can explore right now by yourself, you can come later on with your party members, or you could form a party here with other people. Student Shin YuSung, what do you want to do?"

At Mei Lin's question, Shin YuSung looked around and fell into thought.

'As expected, I... '

As he finished thinking it over, Shin YuSung smiled.

* * *

As soon as it turned morning, sunlight filtered through the curtain. Kim EunAh got up and rubbed her eyes.

'This is... '

She was in a soft bed, wrapped in a velvety blanket.

Judging by the furniture, it didn't seem to be her house. Kim EunAh was rubbing her eyes with a blank expression when she heard a familiar voice.

"Ah! You're up!"

It was Sumire, who was smiling while wearing a T-shirt. Kim EunAh looked at her own clothes.

'What are these clothes?'

The t-shirt she was wearing was too big for her around the chest area.

"Ugh... My head. We're... In the dorms, right?"

Kim EunAh grabbed her head, still hungover, and looked at Sumire.

"Sumire... Where am I? Isn't this... your home?" Kim EunAh looked confused.

Sumire made a troubled smile. "Ms. EunAh... You told me you would go with me, no matter what..."

"Huh? What?! Me?" Kim EunAh denied it while trying to remember what had happened the previous night. She slowly started to remember bits and pieces.

[I~ don't wanna~ I don't want to sleep alone~ Ah, I don't wanna~ Rather than my house~ I want to sleep with my party members.]

She threw a tantrum because she was drunk.

[Sumire... do you like me?]

[KYAA?! YES?! Yes! I like you!]

[Fufu, I also like you~ Then let's sleep together. If you don't, I will take it as if you don't like me...]

The more she remembered, the redder Kim EunAh's face became.

"I... I'm sorry... I wasn't in my right mind yesterday..." Kim EunAh quickly apologized.

Sumire smiled and extended the mini table over Kim EunAh's bed.

"Here! This is your breakfast."

"Porridge?"

"It's breakfast, so I made something easy to digest! Fufu... After all, we all ate a lot yesterday." After saying that, Sumire cutely patted her stomach. Kim EunAh grabbed a spoon of porridge and put it in her mouth. Her eyes shone.

'D-delicious... '

From Kim EunAh's point of view, it seemed more delicious than something a chef would have made. She couldn't understand why.

After she ate the porridge, Kim EunAh spoke. "And YuSung?"

"Ah, YuSung went to the Tower today."

"Alone?"

Kim EunAh seemed disappointed, but that only lasted for a short while. Her spoon stopped—it seemed like she'd remembered something uncomfortable.

[Me? Rather than that, I came to feed YuSung with delicious food...]

[YuSung~ What I give you... eat it well~ You look like a baby bird.]

As soon as she remembered everything that had happened the night before, she thought to herself, 'Let's just die... '

Chapter 127

After being left alone on the 1st floor of the Tower, Shin YuSung looked around for a while.

"Today's goal is the 5th floor."

The warp stone took the floor that the party leader had reached in consideration on future visits to the tower, so although he was alone at the moment, he could continue with his party members later.

"That's why I don't need to clear the lower floors with them."

Shin YuSung could clear the lower floors alone.

Still, playing as a party was better for maximum effectiveness. For example, what if he needed a party to go up to the second floor?

"If you had a choice... would you take party members and reduce the time it takes to clear, or would you choose to do it alone and obtain more experience?"

As Shin YuSung fell into thought while standing in front of the desk, a group of hunters began talking to them.

"Hi~ It seems you're planning to go to the 1st floor. Did you come alone?" said an innocent-looking long-haired woman who had a pin in her hair.

"I... feel like I've seen him somewhere..." said a woman wearing glasses.

"What are you looking at? Are you trying to pick up a girl... w-wait... a boy?" the greatsword-wielding man exclaimed in surprise.

It seemed he was sorry for his reaction, so he tried to apologize. "Ha..."

"haha... It's also our first time in the Tower. We were just surprised to see a student."

"That's right. He's wearing a uniform. How cute~ It reminds me of the past."

The girl wearing the glasses patted YuSung's back and smiled. "How about that~ Do you want to join us?"

"We have an empty spot, so it would be perfect! We're also all Korean..." The girl with the pin in her hair gave him an innocent smile.

Meanwhile, the man with the greatsword hit his chest. "Yes! Come with us! This rank 4 hyeong won't let you get hurt!"

YuSung took a glimpse at how much mana each of the three hunters had.

'Judging by their mana... The man with the greatsword is a rank 4; the other two girls seem to be rank 3 hunters.'

Of course, it wasn't that Shin YuSung's senses were an absolute measuring tool. Just because a hunter had a lot of mana didn't mean they were strong, but he could at least roughly guess.

'It seems that they won't be baggage on the lower floors... '

After quickly getting a grasp of the situation, YuSung smiled and nodded. "Okay. I'll join you until the 5th floor."

The glasses-wearing girl stretched out her arms. "Good~ Good~ Based on your uniform, you seem to belong to Gaon. Let's see your elite skills."

As the party of four reached the front desk, the guide smiled and spoke to them. "I'm going to ask for final confirmation. The destination of you four is the 2nd floor, correct?"

"Yes! Correct!" the girl with the hairpin replied energetically.

The man with the greatsword and the girl with the glasses exchanged conversation.

"What if someone tries to recruit me to a guild? After all, I aim to become an executive of the Association!"

"Pff, don't exaggerate. If someone hears you, they will think you're at least a rank 5."

The glasses girl laughed at the greatsword man and placed her hands on the warp stone.

Paf! Swoosh!

The glasses girl and greatsword man disappeared. The girl with the hairpin smiled at YuSung and began to explain. "The warp stone activates when you place your hands on it and send out some mana. I'm going first, okay?"

Paf! Swoosh!

After seeing the others disappear, YuSung placed his hands on the warp stone.

'Place my hands here and... mana?'

YuSung made a tiny bit of mana flow through his hands.

Paf!

Light surrounded him, and he was dragged into the warp stone.

'It doesn't feel like I'm going to get used to this anytime soon... '

After YuSung took a second to reorient himself, a blue hologram appeared before him.

[ID: Shin YuSung]

[Trait: Heightened Focus]

[Affiliation: Gaon Academy]

[Current Location: 2nd Floor]

[The Hunter Association wishes you luck on your new adventure.]

Paf!

YuSung turned off the hologram and took a look at the area.

Everything in front of them was green—the 2nd floor was a wide grassland.

[3rd Floor Entrance Condition: Kill the Rex Boar.]

[Information: The Rex Boar is the strongest among the Kald Boars and is their leader.]

BOOM!!

Distant steps shook the ground. Boars with red manes that resembled a lion's and sharp claws were rushing toward Shin YuSung's group.

"They aren't giving us a single moment to relax. What a welcome." The man holding the greatsword stepped forward, worried about Shin YuSung.

"Student, move back. We'll deal with this."

"Find their leader in all of that? That will be hard..." The glasses girl put her glasses into her Pocket and retrieved a wand.

The pin girl moved her hands and beckoned YuSung closer "Come here, student YuSung. We don't want you to get hurt already."

Shin YuSung wasn't willing to be treated like a normal student.

'Don't tell me these people don't know how to spot a Rex Boar... '

Rex and Kald Boars looked exactly the same on the outside, but the biggest boar in the group would probably be the Rex Boar.

'You need to observe closely in order to spot the Rex Boar.'

Besides the Kald Boars, which had the lead and had the most dangerous role in the group, the Rex Boar would be somewhere in the middle.

The man with the greatsword was just looking at the foremost boar.

'He definitely doesn't know. I have no choice.'

As a child, YuSung had once faced a group of boars on the Martial Spirits' Mountain. Of course, it wasn't in a group like the Kald Boars, but he'd learned the characteristics of boars.

'The opponent's weapon is their weighty charge.'

The faster they moved, the stronger the impact they'd be able to create, though it was a double-edged sword.

'It seems like it won't be hard this time.'

Shin YuSung, with his great sight, looked at one of the Kald Boars. The target was in the middle of the second line.

'That's definitely a Rex Boar.'

Since he'd set a target, it was time to destroy their formation.

WHOM!!

The greatsword man began getting nervous as the group of boars rushed toward them in a stampede.

"The 2nd floor is already this hard?"

"As expected of the Tower..."

The glasses girl was preparing her Trait. On the other hand, Shin YuSung covered his hand with mana.

SWOOSH!

With his body fortification active, YuSung's hands could even pierce stone.

BOOM!

The leading boar clashed with the greatswordsmen.

'Now.'

* * *

Sumire poured furikake on top of her porridge.

"H-how is it? Is it delicious?"

Sumire waited for Kim EunAh's review with shining eyes. When EunAh saw how anxious she looked, she was forced to nod.

"It's delicious... Really delicious."

"R-really? Miss EunAh, you've probably tasted all sorts of delicious food throughout your life... So I was worried that a porridge like this wouldn't be to your taste... I'm glad you liked it!"

Sumire was really happy, but EunAh was still tearing up from the previous day's memories.

'I... what did I do?'

The more she thought about it, the more she remembered the embarrassing things she'd done. She'd pinched his cheeks, asked him to hug her, had him carry her on his back, bit his ears, and gave him

food to eat.

'EunAh... Let's just die.'

She'd behaved in the worst possible way.

'I never imagined getting drunk from tiramisu... '

EunAh's spoon stopped moving, and she fell into thought. Sumire's expression turned serious.

"Are you worried about something...?"

"Yes. I'm worried about something serious..."

"Wh-what's worrying you?"

"No... It's better if you don't know."

EunAh could never say that she was worried about trying to act cute after getting drunk off of tiramisu.

Sumire smiled at her. "But what you told me... It made me happy... because, among everyone, you picked me."

"H-huh? I said something?"

EunAh began trying to remember again. That time, the target wasn't Shin YuSung, but Sumire.

'What did I say...?'

It didn't matter how much Kim EunAh thought about it, she couldn't remember what she'd told Sumire.

On the other hand, Sumire blushed.

"That... tomorrow, you'd stay with me for the entire day..."

When EunAh heard Sumire's explanation, she finally remembered.

[Sumire~ You're happy about sleeping with me, right? Tomorrow~ I'll play with you~ for the entire day, okay?]

Sumire seemed disappointed at EunAh's reaction. "Ah, if you... forgot about it... I'm okay..."

"N-no! I said we should play together, right?!" As Kim EunAh quickly replied, Sumire's expression brightened.

FWOOSH!

"Okay! Then I'm going to fill the bathtub! I wrote everything you asked for down!"

Sumire smiled and gave her a piece of paper where she'd written what the drunk Kim EunAh had told her.

[1. Make breakfast.]

[2. Bathe together.]

[3. See a horror movie together while eating snacks.]

[4. Pajama party]

[5...]

[6...]

Paf!

Kim EunAh hit her forehead. Sumire had really written it all down.

Sumire was the first same-gender friend Kim EunAh had made. Although she'd always dreamed of it, she'd never done any of it.

'I said all of this with my own mouth...? Ugh... '

EunAh smacked her lips when Sumire called her from the bath.

"Miss EunAh! It's ready!"

"Yes~? Ah! Okay."

* * *

Steam rose from the tub.

Green bath salts floated over the water; Kim EunAh and Sumire looked at each other.

"What I was imagining... Was doing this in my house's bathtub..." Kim EunAh complained. It was a bit small for both of them.

"But... it isn't bad here," she added.

She wasn't saying that out of courtesy. Although she could touch Sumire's legs or arms every time she moved, both of them occupying the entire bathtub didn't feel bad—it felt different from the giant one Kim EunAh had in her house.

EunAh's eyes narrowed as she looked over Sumire's body.

"You... just what did you eat to get..."

"Yes?"

On the other hand, Sumire seemed to be in a good mood, so she just smiled in return.



Chapter 128

Battle God Style - Savage Dragon's Boulder Crushing Palm.

BOOM!!

The dirt scattered away in a strong vortex. Shin YuSung hadn't restricted his strength, so the Rex Boar turned into dust.

"Grr! Grr!"

The Kald Boars were known to follow the one leading the way and trample on everything in their path, and after Shin YuSung killed their leader, they began to move about in confusion.

"Grr! Grr!"

"Grr!"

BOOM!!

The greatsword the man was holding smashed through one of the Kald Boars' skulls.

"I got it! Please, watch the right side!"

"Leave it to me!"

The glasses girl waved her wand; as she did that, vines rose from the ground. The Kald Boars' formation crumbled, and they scattered in all directions.

"Groan!"

"Grr! Grr!"

Shin YuSung made a satisfied smile.

'It didn't even take a minute.'

[Rex Boar has been hunted.]

[You've fulfilled the condition to enter the 3rd floor. The chances of a hidden monster appearing have been increased by 0.025%.]

[The Hunter that killed the Rex Boar will receive the blessing of the Tower.]

Shin YuSung smiled while looking at the Tower's hologram.

'Tower's Blessing... Should I say that I'm lucky or unlucky?'

[Blessing: Rex Boar's Strength]

[Effect: You will receive less damage for the next 7 days.]

The blessing was a type of buff the Tower gave you when you killed a certain boss or cleared a quest. It was rare for the Tower to give you a buff after clearing the 2nd floor.

'As expected from the 2nd floor.'

Although he'd been lucky to get the blessing, its effect was really weak. Since he knew that there were buffs that strengthened your Trait, increased the latent potential of your skills, or permanently increased your mana, the effect of the Rex Boar buff was too weak.

'Still, this should be helpful while training.'

Shin YuSung was planning to take full advantage of the Rex Boar's blessing. He still had the Thousand-Year-Old Jade within his body, after all.

'With this buff, I'll be able to absorb the Thousand-Year-Old Jade's mana more effectively.'

YuSung was thinking about his schedule when a message he hadn't seen before appeared.

[You've unlocked a hidden stage!]

"This...?"

"Th-that?"

On the other hand, when they saw Shin YuSung's skills, the active hunters crowded around him.

"But that student..."

The pin hair girl was a bit afraid.

"Woah, you're amazing..." The glasses girl mumbled in surprise. It didn't matter how she looked at him—he was way stronger than her.

"Although you're a student... you should be way beyond rank 5. Is this the power of Gaon?"

"But... I'm also from Gaon." As the girl with a pin on her hair raised her hand, the girl with the glasses shook her head.

"It seems like they aren't all like him."

Even among active Hunters, Shin YuSung was quite strong. At that point, he couldn't help but question what Yu WonHak had said.

'A hunter as strong as Master... '

He realized it later on, but Yu WonHak had told him all sorts of lies, and among them, the biggest lie was about the strength of hunters.

[YuSung, listen carefully. Outside of the Martial Spirits' Mountain, there were many hunters that could kill a rank 6 boss with just a finger. Not only that, but even students can easily deal with a rank 5 boss.]

[Any active hunter is at least as strong as me!]

But after he came down from the Martial Spirits' Mountain, he hadn't seen any hunters capable of killing a rank 6 boss with only their fingers.

'If there's a hunter like that... it's probably Master.'

Only his partners—the Sword God or the Dark Witch—were comparable to him. Up until that point, Shin YuSung had been deceived by Yu WonHak.

'Of course, I'm sure he did it for me.'

While Shin YuSung smiled as he thought about Yu WonHak, the other three hunters started to mumble.

"But if we're with him... won't we be able to reach the 10th floor?"

They didn't know what sort of quest they'd receive on the 10th floor of the Tower, but just like the glasses girl said, their strength was more than enough.

The man with the greatsword shook his head.

"Just the 10th floor? With enough preparation, I think we could reach the 20th floor. I can guarantee that he's incredibly strong."

"The 20th floor?! Aren't we really lucky?!"

It was understandable that the glasses girl was surprised.

If you reached the 20th floor of the Tower, you basically had a free pass to most guilds. If you joined a mid-sized one, there was a chance they might even give you a good position inside the guild. A hunter's tower record was basically equivalent to their strength.

"The 20th floor... Just thinking about that makes me feel good." The girl with the pin suddenly began looking at Shin YuSung.

"You said you're going to the 5th floor, right?" she carefully asked as she approached him.

"Yes."

"Why don't you come with us to the 10th floor? If you wish, we could make even more preparations and aim for the 20th floor..."

The hairpin girl wanted to get Shin YuSung on their team, but he was firm.

"I'm sorry. I already have a party. I'm also not in the best condition today..."

"Really? Then there's nothing I can do about it. Tsk..."

The greatswordsmen seemed disappointed.

Shin YuSung looked at them.

'I can go up to the 5th floor alone... but there's no need to go up through it alone.'

There was also another reason he couldn't go up through the Tower with them.

[Notification: On the 2nd floor of the Tower you fulfilled the conditions necessary to unlock the 6th hidden stage.]

[1st Condition - Have your first kill be on a boss monster.]

[2nd Condition - Kill it with one attack.]

[3rd Condition - Obtain a buff as a reward for killing that boss monster.]

[Only those that fulfill these conditions can move to the hidden stage.]

[Hidden Stage's Name: Room of Time.]

The hologram contained information about the hidden stage he could enter regardless of the floor that he had fulfilled the conditions for.

'Only I can enter.'

There was no need to reveal it to people that weren't even his party members.

"Then let's meet again some other time! You pretty boy!"

As the glasses girl waved her hand, the group disappeared. Shin YuSung stood in front of the warp stone.

'The hidden stage... '

There was a huge difference in difficulty.

He wouldn't know what it took to clear it until he arrived on the stage.

There was a chance he'd have to hunt a rank 6 boss monster, or it could be a very simple condition, but most of the rewards were incredibly good.

There was a rumor that, among the rewards, there were even some that fortified the Trait that you were born with like the fragment that Sumire had.

'I cannot let this opportunity go.'

It was a stage only Shin YuSung could enter. Since he was alone at the moment, it was the best moment to do it.

Swoosh!

YuSung made a decision and moved mana toward the palms of his hands.

'I won't back off.'

A white light covered YuSung's body.

* * *

EunAh looked at the bucket list of things that she had wanted to do if she ever got a friend.

[3. See a horror movie together while eating snacks.]

The third item on the list was watching a movie. It was quite a humble wish for someone that was a jaebol heir, but Sumire was really the first friend Kim EunAh had ever made.

Crunch! Crunch!

Not only that, but she was even eating popcorn—something Kim EunAh wouldn't have eaten if she were alone.

"Hey, what's the noise coming from the veranda?"

Tsshhh.

Sumie took a sip of coca cola and then said, "It's the sound of rain."

"Why did it start raining right when we began watching a horror movie...? How creepy..."

EunAh had confidently said that a zombie movie wouldn't frighten her, but she huddled up next to Sumire as soon as it began.

"Fufu. There hasn't even been anything scary yet."

"That's right..."

When EunAh nervously ate some popcorn, in the movie, the man wearing a cowboy hat was trying to dissuade the female protagonist.

[Hey, Benna! Don't open the door~! Come on!]

"Come on! Why is she trying to open the door? She doesn't even know what's outside!"

The movie was 'Cowboy vs. Zombie vs. Samurai'.

EunAh had gotten quite immersed in a classic B movie.

"Fufu. She should open the door so we get something fun."

Sumire smiled as if she found Kim EunAh's reaction cute.

'As expected... Miss EunAh is truly cute.'

[Noo! It's~ Janson!]

Despite EunAh's complaint, the female protagonist insisted that it was their partner and was convinced they should open the door.

Clack!

Nobody was on the other side of the door.

[Janson...?] the female protagonist mumbled in a low voice.

[KIIEEKK!] A purple zombie ambushed her from the side.

There was a close-up of the zombie's face, and the female protagonist screamed.

[KYAAAA!]

Contrary to Sumire's expectations, EunAh didn't scream. Instead, she hugged Sumire really tightly.



Although she was scared, EunAh still watched the screen and tried to act calm. On the other hand, Sumire was smiling.

'Miss EunAh is cute... '

[Tang!]

The cowboy shot the zombie.

[KIIIEKK!!]

The zombie's head was blown apart.

Finally, EunAh sighed in relief and began talking about what she would've done.

"H-how stupid... If it were me, I would have gotten the shampoo from the bathroom and then hid under the bed. They said that zombies couldn't tell where you are if they can't smell or hear you."

"Woah, that's right. Maybe a helicopter would've arrived if they just hid like that."

Sumire agreed with her while making a surprised expression.

"Right? They even said that there were canned beans on the 3rd floor, so they'd just have to put water in there."

Kim EunAh began explaining her thoughts with shining eyes. Sumire began thinking as she patted EunAh's back.

The protagonists of the movie hadn't acted as Kim EunAh said because it would make the movie boring.

The movie wouldn't have even started if all the characters acted so thoroughly in regard to safety, but Sumire didn't point that out.

'She's quite immersed... How cute... '

Sumire just looked at Kim EunAh's attitude with a smile. Sumire was also happy to have made a same-gender friend.

'Watching a movie with a friend is so fun... '

EunAh had struggled to make friends because of her background as the heir of the Shinsung Group.

After 'that incident', Sumire's self-confidence had plummeted, so she didn't have any friends, but after they became partners, they filled each other's weaknesses.

Their little movie break was just a continuation of that—Kim EunAh and Sumire's relationship was deepening.

Chapter 129

[You've entered the Hidden Stage, 'Room of Time.']

[Quest: Resist for 7 days.]

[Information: Time spent in the Room of Time doesn't pass outside.]

The Tower's hologram shining in the darkness was all he could see in front of him.

Paf!

As the hologram turned off, there was only darkness.

'The Pocket isn't working.'

Since he couldn't see anything, he checked his ears. He noticed his hearing worsening until he was completely deaf.

'The quest says that I must spend a week here... but I won't know how much time has passed if it's like this.'

After his hearing and sight were restricted, YuSung couldn't even feel his body properly anymore.

It didn't matter if he tried to open his eyes or move his body, he remained in complete darkness and emptiness. It was as if he were in the middle of a deep abyss.

'Seven days in this state... '

He couldn't eat or drink anything in the Room of Time; it was a place where all five senses were restricted. A normal person probably would lose his mind after the first day. The scariest thing was that there was

no way to know how much time had passed.

'This place was very carefully made.'

Senses were relative, after all, which was why people could only see if there was light, could hear if there was sound, and could feel if there was an object.

All of his senses were restricted in the Room of Time, so it felt that his existence was being erased.

'I must keep calm in situations like this... '

The situation was something unknown to Shin YuSung. He'd never experienced something like that.

'I must keep my head calm.'

Just as YuSung thought, relying on your senses to confirm your existence was dangerous.

It was as if you were floundering on top of the sea because you feared the water.

'The fear comes from the unknown... Regardless of what sense the Tower takes from me, it doesn't matter.'

Shin YuSung was alive—he was thinking on his own.

The only way the Room of Time could test him was through taking his senses away. Although a normal person would struggle, Shin YuSung thought nothing had changed.

'After all, everyone has to spend seven days here.'

Shin YuSung decided to change his thoughts and take those seven days as an opportunity.

'Rather than spending it doing nothing... '

YuSung had a buff that allowed him to decrease his tiredness level. To him, it was some sort of challenge. Just in case, he took hold of the mana within his body.

Swoosh-!

YuSung was finally able to feel something for the first time since he entered the Room of Time.

'I can feel the mana...!'

Although he couldn't see anything, the mana of the Thousand-Year-Old Jade flowed.

Thanks to that, Shin YuSung could confirm that he existed, but that wasn't why he was happy.

'I can train!'

He could train there effectively if he could feel mana within the Room of Time. It made him happy to know that.

Even though he could increase his concentration, he couldn't fully erase his senses, but that wasn't the case in the Room of Time.

The hellish restrictions within the place were of great help to Shin YuSung.

'This is great. After all, I even have the buff from the Tower.'

The Thousand-Year-Old Jade had strong mana, and he had difficulty dealing with it due to its special characteristics.

Condensation...

The Thousand-Year-Old Jade had been formed over the course of a thousand years, so it was as hard as adamantite.

Although it had incredible strength, such strength was too hard to pull

and use as he pleased, which was why he had to transform the mana to be similar to his own.

Thus, YuSung had decided to destroy the Thousand-Year-Old Jade's mana with his own as if he were crushing a stone.

Of course, crushing something like the Thousand-Year-Old Jade wasn't easy.

'If I focus my attention for seven days, it should be perfectly doable... '

Not only that, but the days he spent there would be only an instant in real life.

To think he'd be able to clear the hidden stage and even absorb the mana of the Thousand-Year-Old Jade. It was a great opportunity for him.

'I can't wait to see what I get out of this.'

Even the infamous Tower's hidden stage couldn't stop YuSung, the disciple of the Fist King's, forward progress.

* * *

After having a simple breakfast, taking a bath in a small tub, shopping in the hunter's city, and watching a horror movie as they ate cookies, night came, and they finished their pajama party.

Sumire and EunAh had spent an entire day together.

It was time for them to go to sleep.

Sumire and EunAh used the orca as a pillow.



"I had a lot of fun today..." The first one to open her mouth was Sumire.

She seemed a bit disappointed.

"You're right..."

Kim EunAh had the same expression as she looked at the ceiling. If, until then, EunAh and Sumire had experienced a lot of things for the first time as members of the same party, that day, they'd experienced a lot of things for the first time as friends.

"Hehe, I... When you were drunk and said you wanted to play with me, Miss EunAh, I was really happy."

EunAh smirked at Sumire's words. "Why would you be happy because of something like that?"

"Why? Miss EunAh, you're impressive. You're smart and strong... Hehe, and more than that... you're pretty." Sumire began praising her.

"Wh-why so suddenly? Ehem! You're making me embarrassed..." EunAh coughed, but as expected, she seemed to be in a good mood after she heard Sumire praising her.

EunAh took a glimpse at Sumire and said, "You're also amazing..."

"Me?"

"You cook really well."

Sumire seemed proud when she heard EunAh praise her cooking skills, but she added more on top of that.

"And you make people feel comfortable... Well, you're different from me."

"Hehe, but... I often think that if I was a bit braver... I wouldn't have hurt so many people..."

It was the first time Sumire had brought that topic up.

When she remembered 'that incident', Sumire made a bitter smile while looking at the ceiling.

EunAh was still looking at the ceiling when she opened her mouth. "Should we tell each other a secret...? Each of us should tell three. I think that friends shouldn't have secrets..."

As Sumire began folding her fingers while making a serious expression, EunAh sighed. "You idiot, feel free to say anything without pressure."

"I came from Japan... In reality, because I was running..." Sumire spoke her inner thoughts right away.

EunAh's expression didn't change. She just listened.

"I... Increased my ability, and because of me... some students in my class got hurt."

Kim EunAh, who was silently listening, spoke. "You were afraid, right?"

Sumire smiled in surprise as EunAh figured out her inner thoughts. "Yes. I was really scared to see people get hurt because of me... and I was trying to run from the guilt..."

Sumire took a deep breath.

For some reason, she felt her chest tightening. She couldn't understand why, but she wanted to tell Kim EunAh the truth.

"That's why I escaped to Korea. I didn't even say anything to Kirishima, the party leader..."

Sumire felt more relieved after she said what was on her mind.

"Because of me, Kirishima... was hurt again, and because of that, sometimes..." Sumire continued staring at the ceiling and took a deep breath. Telling her secrets was harder than expected.

"I don't like that egotistical me... Although I'm hurt and also hurt so many people, I'm glad to have entered YuSung's party... I can't help but feel ashamed of myself for feeling relieved."

As Sumire finished talking, Kim EunAh frowned.

"Hey."

"Ah, yes?"

As Sumire turned her head...

Paf!

Kim EunAh used both hands to ensure Sumire looked at her.

"Eeh?! Miss EungNa? (Miss EunAh?)"

"That's nothing to be ashamed of, and it's not being egotistical! It's obvious that you would feel good after finding a good person! And it's okay for you to feel relieved while thinking that if you'd stayed in Japan, you wouldn't have met him! Am I right or wrong?" EunAh said with intensity.

Sumire, whose cheeks were still being held, struggled and mumbled, "B-but..."

"But what?! Am I right or wrong?!"

"You're right..."

Tap.

Hearing her answer, EunAh let Sumire's cheeks go; then she calmed herself down and sighed.

"If you're egotistical... then that would make everyone in the world egotistical. That's why you shouldn't think stuff like that, okay?"

"M-miss EunAh..."

As Sumire began tearing up, EunAh opened her arms as if she thought there was no other way.

"Why do you cry so much...? Come here."

Kim EunAh patted Sumire and hugged her.

Paf-

In the end, it was EunAh who ended up being hugged by Sumire, and it was also her who stroked EunAh's hair.

"Sniff, thank you... To think that you would tell me this, Miss EunAh..."

EunAh also allowed Sumire to touch her head.

Pat, pat.

"I'm really happy that you... sniff, are my party member!"

Sumire ended up crying in the end. EunAh gave up.

"I'm just going to stay like this... "

After the commotion passed and Sumire calmed down, Sumire stared at the ceiling and spoke again. "But Miss EunAh... What's your secret?"

"Me? Compared to your secret, it's nothing. It's just that..." Kim EunAh smiled awkwardly and whispered in Sumire's ears. "I won't tell you~"

Sumire made a blank expression at the unexpected answer.

EunAh was smiling mischievously as she always did, like a small demon.

Chapter 130

Whir-!

Helicopter blades whirred.

Beep! Beep!

Cars were honking and making noise everywhere.

"KYAA! What's that monster?!"

"Everyone, come over here!"

Most of London's city guards had gathered around the Thames River, but they weren't enough to guide all the citizens.

"To think that I'd move three kilometers through the river of a big city. What are the hunters d—"

KUOOO-!!!

An unknown cry that was loud enough to shake the entire city spread through the sky.

The city guards looked toward the source of the sound to see a monster standing on the Thames River. It had a completely dark body, sharp teeth, and acid leaking from its mouth. Its red eyes shone.

KUOO! GRRR...

The giant monster that was menacing the city was over 50 meters tall—it was a rank 7 boss that was like a disaster.

'A King's Aura... '

It could absorb mana by attacking the hunters and release it as a beam when it wanted, but the scariest thing about a King's Aura was its incredible regenerative capability.

London was forced to take a defensive stance against the King's Aura.

BOOM!

Weapon emplacements all along the tops of the city's buildings were attacking the King's Aura. London was prepared to face a giant monster of its nature.

That was why London had survived despite monsters bigger than buildings trying to attack it.

A laser shot out from the buildings and burned the King's Aura's body, a missile launched from the road slammed into it, and an endless amount of explosions ensued.

BOOM!

Not even all of those attacks could stop the King's Aura from advancing. Even though its body was burned and smoke was rising from it, the King's Aura kept walking through the Thames River.

TSS! BOOM!

Every time the King's Aura moved, water from the Thames River splashed in all directions. London's city guards couldn't let it advance any further if they wanted to protect the citizens.

- Attention. We will deploy the city defense barrier on the Thames River territory, 32N 22A.

An order came out from their Pockets.

In the end, they allowed the activation of a national-level security weapon.

They were going to use a barrier that was only ever deployed in dire circumstances.

"We're saved!"

As a veteran clenched his fists and shouted excitedly, a newbie city guard mumbled in confusion.

"Can we stop such a huge monster with a barrier...?"

"It seems like you've never seen it. A city defense barrier is really impressive. The biggest problem is that setting it up in the monster's path can be difficult.

"It seems like that's pretty solvable thanks to the monster walking in a straight line."

"Yes."

As the city guards focused their eyes on the Thames River, lights shot from all around and formed a square.

BZZT!

The lasers soon formed a blue surface.

Pang!

In the end, the city defense barrier that was reserved for large cities trapped the King's Aura. China had been able to stop one of the Four Perils, a rank 6 boss called 'Chaos' with one such barrier.

The veteran city guards didn't doubt the barrier and believed they only had to wait for the government to act since the monster was trapped.

But...

Creak-

The King's Aura lowered its head, and red light gathered around its mouth. That was a sign that the King's Aura was about to emit a beam.

"Don't tell me... It's going to use a beam inside a barrier?"

"Wouldn't that be like committing suicide...?"

FWOOSH-!!

An intense red light shot out of the King's Aura's mouth—it was the damage the King's Aura had turned into mana and gathered inside its body.

Paf!!

Thanks to the artifact's power, the beam bounced away.

The King's Aura's body began burning after it was hit with its own attack.

The more it burned, the more intense the light from its body grew.

"Don't tell me-!"

"He's trying to create a feedback loop with his own energy?!" the city guards shouted in surprise.

Creak-

The King's Aura gathered itself. After being hit with the beam, its body was the color of lava.

FWOOSH-!!

The King's Aura used that damage as fuel to attack once again.

PAF-!

Once again, the barrier reflected the King's Aura's beam. Blue and red lights shone over the city.

The more the barrier reflected the beam, the more fuel the King's Aura gained from the damage.

Tsss.

The King's Aura's beam kept getting redder and stronger. Although the monster continued to burn, it kept regenerating.

Crack!

First, a small fissure appeared.

Crack!!

A huge mana fragment split away.

The barrier ended up being crushed and scattered away as glass fragments.

A huge plume of smoke rose, and behind it, the King's Aura's giant body started to appear.

BZZT! Paf!!

That time, the King's Aura's beam started to sweep over the city. Soon after, all of the buildings near the Thames River were burned.

FWOOSH!

Even with the city defense barrier, they couldn't stop the King's Aura. It was a destructive power worthy of a rank 7 boss that was cataloged as a disaster.

London would keep being destroyed until the people from the Hunter's Association arrived.

"The barrier..."

"Is... is this the end?"

The city guards fell into despair as they looked at the King's Aura. The citizens were looking at the Thames River's disaster from a distance.

Meanwhile, of the tower bridge of the Thames River...

One man sitting atop the bridge stopped the entire disaster.

"Tsk, tsk..."

* * *

The man looked around as if he didn't care for something like the King's Aura.

"This happened because they left the safety of a city to a machine like that."

Grab!

The man clenched his fists as he looked at the King's Aura. He didn't have a weapon, just his bare hands, but that was enough.

The man's fists were more dangerous than any city weapon emplacement.

That much was obvious, he was called the 'Fist King' for a reason, after all.

He was the man who ended up standing above all other hunters just by training his body.

KUOOOO-!!

As mana began gathering around Yu WonHak's fist, the King's Aura's eyes started to shine. The monster's seemingly dull senses sharpened.

It hadn't reacted like that even when the entire city had attacked it but did at Yu WonHak's attack.

Yu WonHak smirked.

"It seems like you're a lizard with good senses."

The rank 7 boss, King's Aura's destiny was fixed the moment WonHak clenched his fist.

Pang-!

Battle God Style Sura Fist Punch.

No one near the Thames River had seen such a destructive punch before.

PANG-!!!

The pressure swept forth in a fist of force, split the river, and swept away the surroundings.

Tap, tap.

Yu WonHak clicked his tongue as he shook off his hands.

A huge hole appeared in the King's Aura's body. A disaster-level monster had been annihilated by one attack from the Fist King.

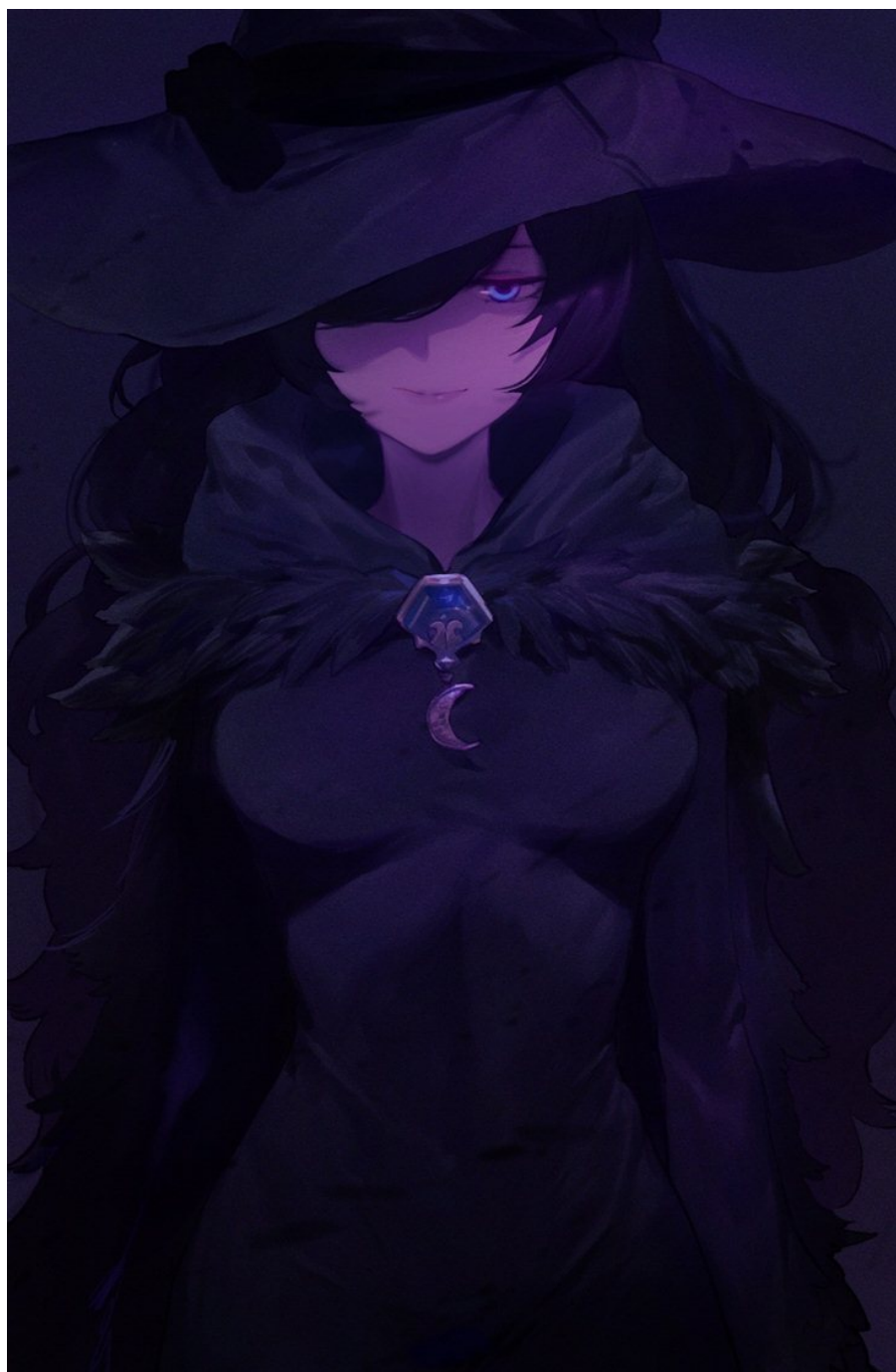
BOOM-!!

As the King's Aura fell to the Thames River, water splashed up again.

Yu WonHak had become the hero who saved London, but he was too used to situations like that.

"If you're so big, you should have spit out an elixir for YuSung at least..." Yu WonHak complained from the tower bridge.

A beautiful woman who seemed to be in her thirties suddenly appeared, smiled, and said, "You're still good."



A big-brimmed hat.

The woman who seemed to have both Western and Eastern beauty carried a mysterious atmosphere and had fascinating black hair.

"Long time no see... Fufu," she mumbled in a low voice while looking at Yu WonHak.

Her laugh seemed to contain hints of happiness at seeing him and melancholy. Despite her greeting, WonHak continued to look over at the corpse of the King's Aura.

"I can't understand it... If you were here, then why did they call me?" Yu WonHak complained.

The witch smiled. "Because I asked them to."

"Why?"

"I wanted to meet an old partner..."

There weren't many people capable of calling the Fist King a partner, even less so who were women.

"That isn't like you, Aris. To think you'd waste my time for something like this."

London's witch, Aris.

Alongside Korea's Fist King and China's Sword God, she was once called one of the strongest hunters. Hunters worldwide wondered if Aris was truly a witch after seeing that she didn't age at all, but that was only because of her strong mana.

Slide.

Aris sat next to Yu WonHak.

Although they'd protected each other's backs for a long time, their

relationship had become awkward. It felt like there was a permanent distance between them.

"Not like me? I just changed. It's been a while, and I'm not the same person I was back then. Also, I had something to tell you."

Aris hesitated a bit. Although they hadn't seen each other for 10 years, Yu WonHak hadn't changed at all.

He still aimed to reach a perfect level of martial arts. A long time prior, Aris had said Yu WonHak's goal seemed dumb, but that wasn't the case anymore.

"I'm raising a child. She's a really cute and good child." Aris smiled at Yu WonHak.

It had taken her a lot of time for her to be able to smile at him like that.

"In reality... I did it because I was envious of your relationship. That person and you seemed to be having a lot of fun."

Aris laughed and then told a mischievous joke. "All that and he isn't even your kid..."

Yu WonHak frowned at those words. "Your joke went too far."

"Well, at first, it was just a whim of mine."

China's Sword God and Korea's Fist King...

Aris' two partners had started to raise their own disciples. The Fist King and Sword God each aimed to raise the strongest possible disciple, but unlike them, she didn't have that goal at first—it was just a flight of fancy.

"Now I'm also greedy. You see, I began wondering something..."

After she saw how strong Lorelei was becoming, Iris's whimsy began

turning into a goal.

"How would you feel if my child beat the child you've invested your everything into... His name is Shin YuSung, right?"

Yu WonHak laughed at Iris's words.

"I'm not sure! That's probably impossible. YuSung... is a monster that will surpass me."

A smile finally appeared on Yu WonHak's face as he talked about his disciple. Iris's lips quivered a bit, but then she narrowed her eyes.

"We'll see about that... Lorelei's strength isn't something you can beat with strength alone."

Tap.

Aris stood up.

"This was fun."

After ten years of them being apart, Aris said goodbye again. Maybe she still had some resentment toward Yu WonHak.

Swoosh!

Black wings appeared on her back.

"Okay."

After Yu WonHak's short goodbye, the black wings covered Aris, and then she took flight.

Paf!

Black feathers fell toward the Thames River. Yu WonHak clicked his tongue as he looked at where Aris had been.

"This is why emotional people are..."

Even if he'd said that, Aris wasn't an opponent that could be taken lightly. If Aris had given her all into teaching her disciple, then there was a chance that a monster might have been born.

'Well, YuSung would probably win in the end.'

The sunset was starting to fall.

The Fist King looked at the panorama of the Thames River. Under the tower's bridge, tons of reporters were trying to meet Yu WonHak.

'Still... I'm also curious. I guess I'll soon see her for myself.'

The first journey in the Tower, Battle God Style's 5th Form, etc...

There were many things Yu WonHak wanted to talk with YuSung about, but it would have to wait. Yu WonHak jumped down from the top of the tower bridge.

BOOM!

There were still things he had to do.

Chapter 131

There was a secret that the Tower hadn't explained in the Room of Time.

[Quest: Resist for 7 days.]

Seven days.

168 hours.

10080 minutes.

604800 seconds.

That was how long he had to resist. Just as the Tower's rules said, time flowed in a precise way...

But the Room of Time had a secret.

'As expected... I wasn't mistaken.'

Shin YuSung, thanks to his Trait [Heightened Focus], could sense that subtle change. As time passed, his senses were being divided, his thoughts were leading to daydreaming, and the number of thoughts greatly increased.

'All of my senses have been separating since I entered.'

It was a curse and buff that was applied to the Room of Time called [Six-Sense Opening], and it was of great help to Shin YuSung.

WHOM-

Although he couldn't see anything in the middle of pitch-black

darkness, the mana that flowed in his body was stronger than usual—he'd absorbed all of the Thousand-Year-Old Jade's mana.

The problem was what happened next.

His thoughts and senses had been increased without limits, so they were providing Shin YuSung with something he'd never experienced before.

[Super Awakening]

Shin YuSung felt his body breathing. It wasn't from his lungs, but his skin, which was something he usually wouldn't be able to feel.

His senses were in an unreal awakened state, and he felt each second as long as a minute. If it kept going on, he might be able to feel a second as if it were eternal.

'So was this what the Tower meant by a week... '

Shin YuSung finally understood.

'This is why one cannot check how much time has passed.'

It was a Tower Trial, so the week it had mentioned wasn't a simple week. Shin YuSung couldn't tell how much time had passed.

A week could be made to feel like a year, or even 10.

Being woken up while unable to tell how much time had passed was the biggest fear most people had after they entered the Room of Time.

Right when Shin YuSung figured out the Room of Time's secret...

- From now on, you can forfeit the quest within the 'Room of Time'.

The Tower's hologram appeared in front of him.

'It's as if it's been expecting it... how explicit.'

Shin YuSung laughed while looking at the hologram.

[Yes / No]

Shin YuSung calmly pressed [No].

The Room of Time didn't seem willing to let a challenger pass. As he refused, his thoughts started to speed up.

[YuSung. Noona was born to rule.]

From memory to memory...

[Everyone that receives the Shin-oh surname shares the same fate.]

Each meaningless scene passed to the next.

[Since you're also my son, listen carefully. Strength is the power to rule over other people. The ability to protect yourself! Stepping on top of others...]

The memories slowly fit together.

[F-rank? Why did my child... Isn't something wrong?]

[Noonim, even so...]

[It's okay... It can be concluded that it's just his luck.]

As lots of memories crossed his mind on their own, Shin YuSung felt time getting longer.

"The Room of Time... The Tower... Wants me to give up on the challenge?"

The Room of Time was showing him his harsh childhood memories one by one.

[YuSung... Isn't the world unfair? You and I were just born in it...]

Shin YuSung frowned.

[Our positions are this different.]

Maybe he didn't like to see Shin HaYoon because of fear—a fear that had been imprinted into him since he was a kid.

[Although we have chosen nothing... Isn't it unfair?]

Shin YuSung wasn't five years old anymore. Even if he encountered her, he wouldn't lower his head.

'How bothersome... '

Shin YuSung smiled.

It didn't matter what the Room of Time showed him—he felt no pain anymore. The young man that had been hurt by others had been changed by someone else.

[Are you going to follow me?]

[YuSung! I saw it through you! The Tower's end! And to show those that rely on things like Trait ranks...]

His capabilities, which were considered trash, were recognized by that man.

[They'll be proven wrong! You can become strong with an F-rank Trait...]

[Shin YuSung, you taught them all...]

He had become someone's hope.

[I'd rather... that you were born with my Talent...]

[Even so, that's not your fault...]

* * *

To someone else, he became consolation.

Despite all that, he was the one who decided his own worth.

'It doesn't matter what the Tower shows me or what trial it brings me.
I won't give up.'

If he hadn't started...

If he'd given up...

Shin YuSung wouldn't have been able to go that far.

'Empty my thoughts.'

The first thing Shin YuSung did was meditate—he emptied his thoughts to maintain his mind.

Meditating was being able to see yourself from a distance. As his inner sight became distant from his imagination, YuSung could see things from a different perspective.

'The Room of Time extends senses—it's similar to when I increase my concentration... '

Even Shin YuSung felt that time moved slower when he increased his concentration.

Others that entered the Room of Time also felt the time extending, which was a buff and a debuff simultaneously.

'What if I can control these senses on my own?'

Controlling the buffs of the hidden stage on their own... That was impossible for most hunters.

If YuSung used his Trait, maybe it was possible.

'Stop my thoughts... and try to revert the body's senses to their original state.'

It was something he hadn't done before.

It was like awakening a new Trait—it was on another level compared to absorbing the Thousand-Year-Old Jade's mana.

For Shin YuSung, using his Trait was as natural as breathing.

Fwoosh!

As if he were lighting up a dark cave, the more he applied mana to his body, the more he began recovering his senses.

As the mana reached his eyes, Shin YuSung smiled.

'I finally understand.'

Surprisingly, the darkness covering his eyes started to fade, and the unnatural sensation in his body started to disappear. He was able to see everything in front of him.

'I know why no one has been able to clear the hidden stage that could be found on the 2nd floor.'

He always found it strange that, among all of the Tower's challengers, no one had been able to clear a stage that was just about enduring for seven days. As long as there wasn't some hidden rule, it didn't make sense.

'So this is why no one was able to clear it before.'

As the darkness disappeared, he checked his Pocket.

[Timer: 167 hours - 59 seconds - 11 seconds]

It was exactly one minute before it became the seventh day.

As your senses were enhanced and time seemed to slow, it didn't matter how long you waited, the quest wouldn't end—the remaining one minute would feel eternal.

Shin YuSung had discovered the Room of Time's secret.

'If I didn't have Heightened Focus... I wouldn't have been able to clear it.'

That was what the Fist King had always talked about—using your Trait correctly.

[The 7 days have passed.]

[You've cleared the Hidden Stage, the 'Room of Time'.]

[Information: Time spent in the Room of Time doesn't pass outside.]

The minute passed, and the Tower's hologram appeared before Shin YuSung. He'd really cleared the hidden stage.

[May the blessings of the Tower follow.]

[Challenger Shin YuSung will be rewarded for clearing the hidden stage.]

[Clear: Room of Time]

[Reward: Time's Administrator (Trait Fortify)]

[Challenger Shin YuSung has been determined as a suitable person.]

"Trait fortify?"

Shin YuSung didn't even have time to be surprised as a golden light wrapped around his body.



[Your Trait has been fortified.]

[The Trait (Heightened Focus) has been upgraded to (Sixth Sense

Awakening).]

[Your Trait will be further enhanced in proportion to the Trait's assimilation rate until now.]

[The Trait (Sixth Sense Awakening) has been upgraded to (Super Sense Awakening).]

As the golden light intensified, it slowly started to melt into Shin YuSung's body.

"Super Sense... Awakening?"

Only Shin YuSung, who'd taken his F-rank Trait to a limit, could clear that hidden stage called the 'Room of Time'. That's why [Super Sense Awakening] was a Trait only Shin YuSung could obtain.

'With this strength... '

After he felt the newly-obtained strength, Shin YuSung clenched his fists.

Chapter 132

Within Academy City's only Association branch, Mei Lin found herself busily going through countless documents.

"How many days has it been of document work...?"

Although she'd spent half the day taking care of documents, a whole pile was still on top of the table. Mei Lin sighed and spoke to her Pocket.

"Check the passing list."

She'd concluded she would rather check the hologram than keep looking at documents—there was also a subject she was interested in.

"Subject, Shin YuSung."

[Shin YuSung - Pass list]

[Tower Floor 2 Clear]

[Hidden Stage Found (Room of Time)]

[Hidden Stage Challenge (Room of Time)]

[Hidden Stage Clear (Room of Time)]

[Reward: Trait Fortify]

Mei Lin looked at the hologram with a blank expression.

"Huh...?" Her eyes widened. "A h-hidden stage?"

Mei Lin gulped at YuSung's unreal achievement. She was in charge of

the Academy City's hunter branch, so it was weird for her to get so surprised, but YuSung's record was that shocking.

"He... really found the hidden stage and cleared it? On the first day?"

Based on the record, Shin YuSung had cleared the 2nd floor and fulfilled the conditions for the hidden stage to appear. That in itself was already impressive.

"Is something like this even possible...?"

The problem was that he'd challenged and cleared the hidden stage without even a hint of fear.

Gulp.

Just who was he?

'As expected, he's Korea's peak... No, he's soon going to be even more than that.'

Mei Lein glanced at the documents she was tired of looking at and stood up.

YuSung was still a 1st-year student, yet he'd cleared a hidden stage and obtained a Trait fortification as a reward.

'I'm going to inform the Association President.'

The documents weren't as important as what YuSung had done.

* * *

Gaon's hallways had a clean beige and white design.

Tap, tap.

Shin YuSung looked around as he walked down the hallway and frequently overheard conversations he had no interest in.

"Even if we went with an active hunter, wouldn't that be dangerous? How could we hunt a rank 3 boss?"

"We just have to watch from a distance. Like that, we'll see a line in the reports saying, 'During their 1st year, they hunted a rank 3 boss!'.

"That would be helpful for when we applied to a guild."

"What's up with the S class's atmosphere? It seems like they fought."

"You didn't hear? Lee ChaeHyun and Min SungHyuk aren't getting along."

"Are they fighting over who should be class representative...?"

"You know~ In a place with no tigers, the fox is the king~"

YuSung fell into thought as he heard the class B students conversing.

'Is it because Adela went to Italy...?'

He'd heard that Adela had decided to participate as Italy's representative.

If it wasn't a simple one-on-one duel and was a match at the International Competition, he couldn't guarantee that he'd be able to beat her.

'Still, I have the strength of my new Trait and the power of the Thousand-Year-Old Jade... '

The problem was that he had to help his other party members get stronger. Thankfully, Sumire had been chosen by Laplace and obtained a huge amount of strength.

'I should help Sumire with the strategy aspect so she can use more of the witch's fragment's power... '

Sumire had already become stronger than before, so he didn't have to

do much as the party leader when it came to her.

'Then the one that needs to get stronger is EunAh... '

Working on EunAh's potential seemed more effective to him.

Although her Trait was A-rank, the potential of her electric Trait was S + . Her destructive power was especially impressive.

The problem was the concentration it took to safely control that strength.

'What EunAh lacks are things I can teach her.'

YuSung was planning to give Kim EunAh personal training.

'As expected, for EunAh... '

Surviving in the wild, having a waterfall pour down on you, and using mana to fortify your body to resist the cold...

Shin YuSung thought of the training techniques he'd learned from the Fist King.

'That training should be the best.'

A certain technique came to his mind.

* * *

Sunlight poured into the clubroom, and Kim EunAh was looking at a box of chocolate with a nervous expression on her face.

'H-how did it come to be like this...?'

It started with a TV drama she'd been watching with Lee SuHyun. The male protagonist gave a diamond ring to the female protagonist.

[Sniff, Mr. TaeSoo! I...]

[She's so happy to have received a ring? Her life was at risk because of him... To be honest, I can't understand why they're dating,] Kim EunAh said, an uninterested expression on her face as she saw the female protagonist crying in the man's arms.

Lee SuHyun sighed. [Miss, of course she'd like it. It isn't the gift that's important but the feelings behind it.]

Lee SuHyun took a glimpse at Kim EunAh and shook her head. [Miss, you have too much money, so you probably wouldn't feel the sincerity behind something like a diamond ring, but...]

[Sincerity?] EunAh asked back with uninterest.

[Then... what would you consider a sincere gift?] SuHyun said as if it was just in passing. She had already figured out Kim EunAh's thoughts.

[In your case, miss, wouldn't it be something handmade? Like chocolate or a scarf, for example.]

Her situation was a result of having been deceived by that. Kim EunAh looked at the chocolate box with a serious expression on her face.

"Did I go too far...? No matter how much I think about it, I feel like chocolate is too weird."

Although it wasn't Valentine's Day, chocolate was usually given to someone you liked of the opposite gender.

'I felt bad for not being there, so I wanted to give him a present... '

She hadn't found it weird when she'd been preparing it. The chocolate was shaped like a caricature of YuSung's face. It was supposed to be a friendship gift.

When she imagined giving it to him, she couldn't help but feel her

heart tickle.

'What should I say as I hand it to him...? It would be weird to give it to him out of the blue. He might misunderstand things... '

While Kim EunAh had fallen into thought, the club's door opened.

"EunAh, so you were here." YuSung greeted her like always.

EunAh was surprised and hid the box.

"Huh? I... I also just got here!"

As she hid the box, she couldn't help but think that her actions were weirder.

'Why am I afraid of giving a box of chocolates?'

She bit her lips at the embarrassment she was feeling.

"You... went to the Tower, right?" EunAh asked.

"Yes. It was easy because it was just the 2nd floor," Shin YuSung replied while grabbing banana milk from the fridge.

He sat on the sofa and told her what he'd experienced. "I plan to clear up to the 5th floor because you cannot activate the warp before that and clear it with the party from there. Of course, we must also prepare for the next International Competition match..."

"Really? Well, I guess it will be okay. They say that even rank 3 or 4 hunters can clear up to the 5th floor..." EunAh was still looking at him cautiously.

She was thinking about when to give him what she'd prepared so it wasn't weird. It was a nerve-wracking moment.

Tap.

Kim EunAh placed the box of chocolates on YuSung's knees.

"EunAh, this..."



EunAh blushed and turned her head away.

"It... it's just chocolate. I felt bad about the International Competition... and you also cleared the Tower..."

Kim EunAh gave all sorts of reasons; then she spoke in a careful tone. "You like sweet things..."

Shin YuSung liked sweet things more than anything, so she'd prepared it based on his tastes.

YuSung smiled and then said her name. "EunAh..."

"What...?"

She was already getting embarrassed. It was the type of situation she always hated in TV dramas and called cheesy, but as she was put in a situation like that, she couldn't help but nervously fiddle with her fingers.

YuSung expressed his gratitude to her. "Thank you."

Considering Kim EunAh's usual personality, her giving a gift was unthinkable. When she heard his thanks, her expression relaxed a bit.

Thanks to that, she even made a profound expression and began speaking. "It's nothing..."

Shin YuSung just silently smiled.

Chapter 133

On Liberty Island's Statue of Liberty, from where you could see all of New York, there was a stadium located in the sky known as 'Sky Island'.

"The match between each country's representative will take place on Sky Island!"

The most famous actress in New York, Rose Mary, held the microphone while her blue hair flickered in the air.

"The event that will decide the pride of Italy and the USA is...!"

BRRR!!

Events flashed over the screen in a random order. Then, with a '*ting!*' sound, it stopped.

[Battle Royal]

"The event that the Statue of Liberty has chosen is 'battle royal'! It's a perfect event to showcase a decisive battle!"

Adela confidently looked over the narrow and plain battlefield.

Slide.

As Adela began to stand, Leo quickly stood and spoke. "Sophia or I will participate in the first match instead of you."

The Battle Royal went on until only one was left. Since it didn't have any rounds, Leo wanted Adela to be last

Adela was the strongest force on Italy's team. Even if she defeated two

people, he didn't want to show her losing to the public.

"No." Adela refused Leo's proposal and slowly walked toward the field.
"I'm going first."

"Then..." Leo said, a confused expression on his face.

Sophia nodded, gripping her book. "Party leader Adela probably thinks she's going to beat all of them alone..."

* * *

Adela and Colt stared at each other.

Colt looked somewhat like a cowboy.

"Lady, I've heard a lot about you. They say you're quite strong."

Adela didn't say anything in reply to Colt's greeting. The counter was all they could see, displayed as a hologram in front of them.

It wasn't a virtual place but a real stadium. The only thing that protected them was a barrier that surrounded their bodies.

"I heard you were ranked 1st in Gaon. It's an honor. My gun always craves to fight the strong..."

[3]

There were only three seconds left until it began.

Colt got in position. Regardless of how strong the opponent was, the only thing he had to do was to destroy her barrier.

[2]

Two seconds left.

Colt smiled as he thought about the fortified bullets in his gun.

'I already prepared a way to get rid of Adela.'

The fortified bullets had a mana resistance effect—each bullet could destroy a certain amount of mana.

Destroying a mana barrier with them was easy.

The number on the hologram reached '1'.

Pang!

The hologram announced the start of the battle with a vibrant effect.

[Start!]

'I'll end it with one shot!'

Tang!!

[Bullet Time]

Colt's Trait was [Quick Firing].

Colt's bullets instantly reached Adela. The moment it touched her barrier, the battle would end.

"Huh?" he exclaimed in surprise at what ended up happening.

As if time had stopped, the bullet wasn't moving at all.

Adela moved her index finger, otherwise standing completely still.

Tap.

The bullet fell to the ground.

Adela looked at Colt, a cold expression on her face.

"Is that all?"

"H-how...? My bullets have mana..."

Instead of answering Colt's question, Adela clenched her fist.

Clang!

Adela's cold wind froze the air and created a wall. She could exercise physical strength through the ice crystals that had spread along the terrible, chilling air.

Colt had misunderstood things, which had led to his bullet being frozen.

"I see..."

What Adela could control was the space around her. You couldn't go against her defense by just absorbing mana.

The strength and speed of his bullets...

Adela could control everything within her space—she had frozen the air itself.

Adela was the only thing able to freely move within her space. Her Trait was on another level compared to the ones Colt had faced until that moment.

Crack!

There was a chilling sound, and Colt looked at his hands. His right hand, along with his gun, had frozen.

"I'll need to control my strength, so I can just break the barrier..."
Adela calmly said and then pointed Colt's head with her index finger.

Paf!!

An icicle shot from her finger.

Crack!!

Adela's icicle emitted a spark in front of Colt's barrier and ended up breaking it.

Crack!

Colt's head would've been blown away if she'd used a bit more mana.

Paf.

Colt collapsed to the ground out of nervousness. Although the battle was short, Colt realized how different they were in strength.

'Monster... '

[Winner - Adela Ortensia]

[Score 1:0]

There were only two students from Highway Star Academy left, but from the moment Adela appeared, the winner was decided.

[Score 3:0]

All three matches ended in her win.

After she eliminated all of them by herself, Adela frowned.

'As expected, boring... '

Although she was receiving attention from the cameras around the stadium, Adela was thinking of someone else—the only one who had been able to make her heart beat faster.

Adela, who'd become a couple of times stronger than before, thought of YuSung and smiled.

* * *

Kim EunAh, 17 years old.

She was the granddaughter of Shinsung Group's Kim SeokHan and was a jaebol among jaebols who hadn't done any hard work in her life.

...But that day was different. She had never struggled as much before...

She'd climbed up a mountain with a tire attached to her, hunted a rank 1 monster with her mana sealed, and moved mana through her body while being hit with a waterfall.

The only training Kim EunAh had done until that moment was catching a few monsters in a clean image room.

Shin YuSung's training was too much for Kim EunAh.

"This... this is strange... YuSung, he's out of his mind..." Kim EunAh mumbled, making a blank expression while sitting at a wooden table.

Sumire looked at the grill and smiled.

"This grill was a great buy~! It can even go inside the Pocket..."

She was humming as if she were feeling good while cooking the meat skewer. Kim EunAh narrowed her eyes at Sumire, who seemed to be in a perfect state.

"Hey, Sumire, what did you do today?"

"Me? Ah, I... cleared an undead dungeon with Lilith and my death knight..."

When she heard Sumire's explanation, Kim EunAh shouted at Shin

YuSung.

"Hey! I also want to do things like that! Let me clear up dungeons!"

Kim EunAh didn't want to go through Shin YuSung's harsh physical training. What she wanted to do was normal stuff like clearing dungeons.

YuSung nodded.

"Okay. Then should we try clearing a dungeon with your mana sealed?"

"Hey, why do you keep trying to seal my mana?!" Kim EunAh complained at Shin YuSung's reply.

YuSung had chosen that type of training for a reason.

"It's to help you keep your concentration."

"You already explained that..."

"Your Trait is already strong; the versatility of its power is also great, but in terms of physical strength, you're a six-year-old child."

From YuSung's perspective, Kim EunAh's physical strength was that of a six-year-old kid.

EunAh shouted as if such a remark was unfair. "Based on what parameters am I a six-year-old? Where have you seen a six-year-old that moves like me?"

Shin YuSung pointed to himself.

Kim EunAh shouted at him. "You're the weird one! Sniff, I'm average..."

She'd lost her mind and kept mumbling while laughing in a low voice. "Hehehe... Why do I have a tire attached to my waist...?"

"That's to maintain the strength of your body," Shin YuSung kindly answered.

"Why do I have to hold my breath underwater?"

"That's to increase your concentration."

"Then why must I fight a rank 1 monster with my mana sealed?"

"I'm going to teach you a new style of fighting."

Every time EunAh asked a question, YuSung answered without hesitation.

EunAh gulped. "Hehe... Th-this. How much more do I have to do of this? Today's... Today's the end, right? YuSung?" EunAh mumbled, making an expression that made it seem like she had given up on everything.

If she had to keep training like that, there was a chance that she might really lose her mind.

"Maybe four or five more days?"

YuSung, on the other hand, was smiling brightly.

"Ehehe, hehehe..." Kim EunAh just laughed.

It seemed like her mind had been blown away by the shocking reality. Although she could smell a delicious barbecue from a distance, she wasn't even hungry.

"Today's menu is barbecue!" Sumire put down a skewer that had meat and vegetables on it, and EunAh grabbed one without any strength.

If, until that day, she'd eaten things for the balance of her body and the taste, she was eating to survive.

'I feel like I'll die if I don't eat... '

Kim EunAh had no choice but to eat, but a shocking taste spread through her mouth.

Sumire had made a sauce based on Kim EunAh's taste, and she'd overcooked the meat on purpose so that the fire gave it a subtle flavor.

As the soft meat coated in sauce spread through her mouth, EunAh ate as if she'd forgotten she was tired.



"I'm so tired I feel like I'm about to die... but why's the food so delicious...?"

EunAh kept eating the barbecue skewer, and Sumire smiled at her.

Shin YuSung's special training was going better than expected.

Chapter 134

There were five dungeons on the 'Five Islands'.

It was a training place for mid-rank hunters that was administrated by the Hunter Association.

"This is a place that can usually only be accessed by active hunters... "

Thanks to Hunter Association President Kang YuChan, YuSung could use most of the Hunter Association's installations.

Thanks to that, training became more comfortable.

YuSung opened his mouth as they stood in front of a destroyed castle within a forest.

"This is the only undead dungeon on the Five Islands."

They were beneath a cliff where barely any light reached, so the castle even looked creepy on the outside. =

"YuSung... are you also going to come?" Sumire had high hopes that she might get the opportunity to train alongside YuSung.

He nodded. "Sumire, you've obtained a lot of strength thanks to Laplace's fragment, so what you need are tactics and power."

YuSung was going to teach Sumire war techniques he had learned from the Fist King.

Sumire fought using an army of undead, so she had to learn how to fight by taking advantage of that.

"At first, it's important to figure out the terrain of the battlefield."

Sumire nodded at Shin YuSung's words while taking notes on her Pocket.

It was a castle with many narrow hallways that restricted sight, and they were going to attack one of its towers.

Sumire raised her head and looked at the abandoned castle.

"Since this building is a castle... Okay! I'm confident!" she energetically replied.

YuSung smiled at Sumire. "Then should we enter?"

* * * *

Sumire had never received elite education. Maybe that's why her grades were the lowest when she had just entered elementary school, but it didn't take her long to get to the top of every single subject.

Hunter Studies...

Dungeon Studies...

Attribute Studies...

Potion Studies...

Sumire had gotten full marks in many different subjects—including World History and Guild Dungeon Clearing.

She got full marks in most theory classes in Japan and Gaon. Rather than it being attributed to her intelligence, it was because of her personality.

[The most important thing when it comes to studying is to take notes.]

[Rather than learning many different things, it's more important to remember what you've learned.]

[Remember what you've learned and the foundation, understood?]

Her foundation, what the book said, and remembering what she'd learned...

From a teacher's perspective, Sumire was the best possible student.

Her personality, once again, showed results in YuSung's training.

'Just like YuSung taught me... I should keep escape routes in mind in narrow hallways and send groups ahead to scout.'

Sumire's learning ability was top-notch.

There might be things she didn't know, but she never forgot what YuSung taught her.

"There's a chance that a trap or monster could be hidden in a high place like that, so I'm going to send my bat familiar!"

Just like YuSung taught her, Sumire was calmly clearing the dungeon. Even YuSung was surprised at her decision-making ability.

'I chose an undead dungeon on purpose... but to think she'd be this good... '

YuSung saw Sumire's undead army cover the entire castle. With Lilith and the death knight at the front, an endless amount of familiar spirits and skeleton warriors poured out.

If an undead broke, Sumire's touch fully healed it.

"Raise..."

As she went from [Controller of the Undead] to [Witch's Black Magic], Sumire's Black Magic became stronger.

"Master, the dungeon boss is inside this room," Lilith reported to Sumire, kneeling in front of her.

The death knight raised its sword into the sky and shouted, "I'll... go... first! De... sp... air to the e... nemies!"

"No. We're going to stop for today..."

Sumire shook her head and gave an unexpected order. Although the dungeon boss was right before her, she decided to give up.

"Sumire, why did you stop here?" YuSung asked her.

Sumire laughed while making an 'a-ha' expression and showed him her hologram.

"Before coming here... I investigated the bosses. The one that appears in the abandoned castle is Racule. Here!"

Sumire looked embarrassed as she pointed at the hologram.

[Boss Name: Racule of the Black Cape]

[※ Warning: Its Trait is too strong, so I should check it out beforehand and be careful! I could suffer a great loss... (◡◡◡◡◡)π]

[Trait: Blessing of the Abandoned Princess]

[Effect: Every 24 hours, a buff or a debuff will be applied on Racule alternately. Some of the buffs can double its mana and physical capability. Among the debuffs, there's one that reduces its fighting capability by 50%. A 4x difference! (◡◡◡◡◡) /]

The hologram was full of Sumire's notes.

"To think that she'd investigate all five dungeons. She really prepares a lot... '

YuSung always did his best, but even he was surprised at Sumire's level of preparation.

"Racule is an undead. He won't move from the stage if there's no other

challenger, so... If I attack tomorrow, I thought I could reduce the damage taken without any other variables..."

Sumire was blushing as she explained, fiddling with her fingers and smiling.

"Since this training is going to take a few days..."

Sumire was already happy about sleeping alongside YuSung, cooking for him, and attacking the dungeon with him.

Unlike EunAh, who was half-dead, Sumire seemed to be having fun.

"Training... can make you really happy."

YuSung nodded in satisfaction at Sumire's preparations. "Good, Sumire! Let's get Racule tomorrow. A rank 4 boss is worthy of putting in the effort."

"Yes! Okay! Then, YuSung... I'll return to the lodging first."

Although the Five Islands were islands with dungeons, there was hotel-grade lodging on them as well that everyone who went there stayed in.

Sumire had thought of returning earlier and to begin preparing the dinner.

"Wait for dinner...!"

* * *

EunAh's special training was taking place on the North side of the Five Islands, inside a green forest.

EunAh stretched, wearing leggings and a T-shirt that allowed her to move more freely.

The smooth curve of her body was easily visible beneath her thin

clothes. Although she had never trained inside a mountain like YuSung, she had followed YunHa's physical routine.

Maybe it wasn't in the same sense, but nevertheless, EunAh's body had been trained.

"Haa, my muscles hurt, but I guess this will be better than pulling a tire."

EunAh smiled as she stretched, and YuSung smiled too.

"You'll probably be able to learn fast."

The theme of the special training was 'martial arts'.

EunAh didn't seem convinced.

"Are fighting techniques going to be helpful to me? It doesn't matter how much I practice, I'll still be weaker than you."

She was wrong.

Shin YuSung was trying to teach her fighting techniques for another reason.

"No. Fighting techniques are weapons that suit you very well, EunAh. It makes even more sense because your Trait is Electricity."

Shin YuSung got into position and swung his fist toward the trees.

Pang! Crack-

The trees shattered.

"This is the average speed of my attack. Although my fist can be strong, your electricity is faster."

The speed of electricity was similar to the speed of light—no one could physically make an attack faster than that.

"EunAh, why do you think people can react to your attacks?"

That was a question EunAh had never thought about.

"I... I'm not sure."

As Kim EunAh scratched her cheeks, YuSung's body disappeared.

Pat!

"Huh?"

Kim EunAh blinked, and YuSung's foot suddenly covered her vision.

Pang! Fwoosh!

The wind from his foot pushed her back.

"Puff! Hey! What are you doing?!"

Kim EunAh quickly got up, holding the ground for support.

"Would you be able to block that attack?" YuSung said with a smile on his face.

EunAh shook her head, giving him a suspicious glare. "No... It was too fast."

"That's right. To block an attack, you need to be able to react equally as fast; it's the same for attacking."

Shin YuSung grabbed a stone and targeted a hyena-like monster watching from the sidelines.

Pang!

YuSung threw the stone, and the monster flew into the sky to avoid it.

"When did that get here?" EunAh mumbled in surprise.

Even as he did that, YuSung kept explaining to EunAh.

"If your reflexes are bad, you'll miss the target because it'll already be too late when you attack."

YuSung grabbed a stone again.

Once again, he aimed for a flying monster, but that time, he correctly read its movements and threw the stone.

Pang!!

In the end, the stone hit the monster, and it fell to the ground.

"Woah..." Kim EunAh exclaimed in surprise.

YuSung calmly spoke. "What you need is the ability to make decisions faster and reaction speed. After all, noticing an attack opportunity and activating your Trait needs training."

Two hours passed. Unlike her initial motivation, just learning the basic positions had already drained up quite a bit of her stamina.

"Like... like this...?" Kim EunAh, who was half-dead, asked.

Shin YuSung slowly walked toward her. "No. Move your waist back a bit, and your hands and shoulders should be in a straight line."

Tap.

Shin YuSung put his hands on Kim EunAh's waist and arms to correct her position.

"Huh, huh...?"

They were so close that their faces almost touched. Not only that, but YuSung's hands were on Kim EunAh's waist.

"Eh..."

EunAh's face went completely red.



Chapter 135

[YuSung! Your waist is bent! How can you extend your fist with a posture like that?]

Shin YuSung was used to correcting the postures of others.

[Tsk! Your balance is off!]

It was all because his master, Yu WonHak, had repeatedly corrected his posture.

For EunHa, Shin YuSung's touch was too sudden.

As YuSung's hands touched EunAh's waist, she stiffened.

"Your h-hand..."

EunAh's face reddened at the unexpected touch. Even in her confusion, YuSung kept kindly explaining the movements to her.

"EunAh, I told you to straighten your fist so that you can control your reach to the target."

He grabbed EunAh's fist and corrected her posture. EunAh wanted to say something, but YuSung was too serious.

"Where you can punch and how far you can punch will determine if you win."

YuSung smiled brightly and then made Kim EunAh punch the palms of his hands.

Tap.

"If you're this close, the punch will be weak."

Vroom-

Shin YuSung grabbed Kim EunAh's arm by the elbow and made her extend her fist.

"If it's this far, it won't reach."

Every time YuSung's touched EunAh, she trembled a bit but didn't want it to make it visible.

YuSung was correcting her posture out of a pure passion for teaching her—she knew very well that he didn't have any other intentions.

"This guy is quite dense when it comes to things like that... '

YuSung probably didn't know women very well because he'd spent most of his life on the Martial Spirits' Mountain.

"In a fight, distance determines whether your attack lands or if you can dodge someone else's attacks."

YuSung slapped EunAh's thighs, and her legs reflexively bent.

"Eek?!"

Her face had gone completely red, but Shin YuSung hadn't noticed that.

"That's why you can use your legs to advance or retreat."

He was still focused on explaining posture to her.

YuSung grabbed EunAh's shoulders and lowered her posture a bit; then, he lowered himself and helped her bend her knees.

"If you're aiming lower, you just have to bend your knees, right?" Shin YuSung explained with a bright smile on his face.

As his hands approached her waist again, EunAh moved back in surprise.

"W-wait...!"

EunAh seemed quite flustered, and she looked at YuSung with tears in her eyes as she let out heavy breaths.

She turned her head to look away and mumbled, "I s-suffer a lot because I'm ticklish... so d-don't touch my waist..."

* * *

There was a huge building called the Five Lounge at the center of the Five Islands.

It was a place for the hunters that went to the Five Islands, but it wasn't that all hunters received the same accommodations.

The bronze card allowed you to access the restaurants on the 1st floor and provided you with a small room, the silver card provided you with a wider variety of benefits besides that, the gold card gave you a room comparable to a hotel's suite room and you also received VIP treatment, and then there was the rare black card.

[Verifying black card...]

[No.33 verified.]

[The Five Lounge welcomes member Kim EunAh.]

[Your assigned lodging is 5B.]

[Current lodging member: Hanajima Sumire]

EunAh put away her card and spoke to YuSung. "Sumire is already in. Should we go up right now?"

"Yes. I'm hungry, so let's stop training and go up."

"Don't mention training in the lodging. Just hearing that word... makes my body feel sticky," Kim EunAh complained and then sniffed her body. She'd gone through so much that her T-shirt was completely soaked in sweat.

"Let's go. I want to take a shower," EunAh said with a disgusted expression.

Shin YuSung smiled.

Ting!

They entered the elevator, and it was only then that the other hunters in the lobby began murmuring to themselves.

"Those kids have a black card?"

"Don't you know them? One's the disciple of the Fist King. According to the rumors, even the Association President..."

"What a solid path. How envious."

Although the VIP was Kim EunAh, most people focused on Shin YuSung—which proved how famous YuSung had become. Other hunters viewed him with envy and jealousy.

'That kid... '

Among them, a brown-haired girl fell into thought as she looked at the closed elevator.

'He's connected to YuWol by blood, right?'

Although they looked the same age, she thought of YuSung as a kid.

'Shin HaYoon, Yuwol, and even that kid? Fufu. What an... interesting family.'

She'd lived a long time, so maybe that was why she knew all about

the hunters' world, including things relating to the Shin-oh family.

'Before the leader or Yu MinSeo put their eyes on him, I should... '

Everyone in the business knew that the Shin-oh families—Yu MinSeo and Shin KangYoon—were lusting over Shin YuSung.

Yu WonHak was the only thing that kept them from making a move.

'Is it still too early?'

The brown-haired girl made a mischievous smile and bit her lips.

* * *

[Verifying black card...]

[5B verification complete!]

[Welcome. There are currently 3 members assigned to the lodging.]

The Five Lounge's installations would be the envy of even the most luxurious hotels, but what dragged Shin YuSung's attention was the delicious aroma of food he smelled as soon as he opened the door.

'As expected of Sumire's cooking... '

The food was definitely delicious—YuSung was sure of that based only on what he could smell. Maybe it was due to the training, but YuSung was feeling extremely gluttonous.

"Ah! EunAh! YuSung! You came back sooner than expected!" Sumire, who'd been resting on the bed, waved her hand.

"Sumire!" Kim EunAh rushed toward Sumire and hugged her.

"YuSung's training style is completely psychotic!"

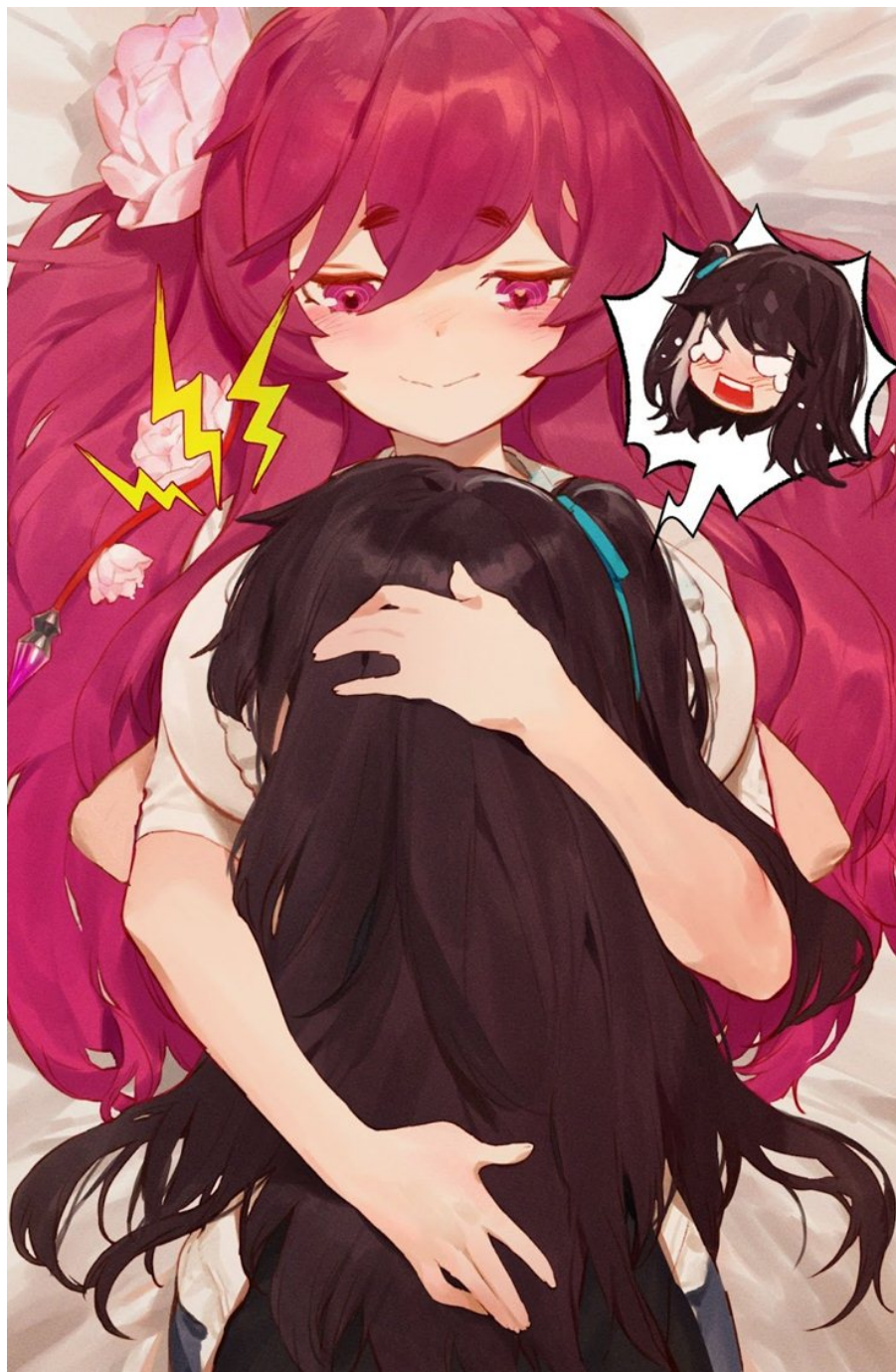
Although it was easy for Shin YuSung, it was too harsh for Kim EunAh. Thanks to that, all of her muscles were screaming.

Although she hadn't made it visible while it was only the two of them, it seemed like EunAh had found the training difficult.

"He made me march with a tire attached to me... I even climbed up a cliff with my bare hands! I thought I was going to die..."

Unlike her usual self, EunAh was complaining.

'Cute... '



As she heard EunAh complaining, Sumire thought of her little siblings in Japan. For some reason, it felt familiar.

"Fufu. Ms. EunAh, it was really hard, right?" Sumire stroked Kim EunAh's head.

"But even though it might have been hard..." she said in a sweet and soft voice that sunk into EunAh as if it was being driven into her. "Miss EunAh, you're doing a great job."

"S-Sumire..." EunAh's voice trembled as if she were moved.

YuSung broke the atmosphere to ask about food. "Sumire? What's on today's menu...?" He could smell the well-cooked pork.

Still hugging EunAh, Sumire looked at YuSung. "Ah! Today's menu is... food from Okinawa! It's where I used to live in Japan."

Sumire looked at both of them and then said in a strict voice, "But go take a shower before we eat! I'll take care of preparing the food."

Room 5B could only be accessed with a black card, so it had quite luxurious amenities—there was a bathtub you could soak in and a separate bathroom as well.

"Then I'll take the bathroom. I don't want to soak in water for no reason. Doesn't that seem too much like what an old man would do?" EunAh's words were hard to understand.

Sumire looked at Kim EunAh as if those words troubled her. "Ah, but isn't the b-bathtub also nice...? Although it isn't a hot spring..."

"Do you like hot springs? Should I buy you one?" Kim EunAh said it as if it were nothing while tossing her socks away.

Sumire covered her mouth and laughed. "Haha! How fun!"

To think that she'd buy someone a hot spring as a present—it seemed like Sumire had taken Kim EunAh's words as a joke.

'There's a chance that EunAh isn't joking at all... '

When you considered how wealthy EunAh was, it wasn't impossible at all. There wouldn't even be anything strange about EunAh gifting her an entire lodging with a hot spring built in.

"I'm serious. It isn't that expensive, after all."

"Come on~ Miss EunAh~ Don't joke~ Okay, then! Both of you... take your time to clean yourselves and come back, okay?"

Sumire confidently brushed off Kim EunAh's words as a joke.

YuSung looked at the two of them getting along, a smile on his face.

Chapter 136

Night had fallen over the open-air bath.

It was the first time YuSung had experienced warm water accompanied by the cold night breeze.

'So these are the installations a black card gives access to... '

YuSung leaned his back against the marble and closed his eyes.

'I almost want to fall asleep like this.'

Even so, he couldn't do that.

The open-air bath might have been good, but Sumire's food awaited him. Her food was the best gift for YuSung after training.

'The smell... was also great.'

Unlike his ambitious goal, YuSung found happiness in small things in life. For example, the fried chicken in curry.

Psss-

As he moved his arm, the water scattered away from his fingertips. He could feel that his body had changed.

It had started in the Room of Time.

Shin YuSung's Trait, [Heightened Focus], had evolved to [Super Sense Awakening].

Back then, the only changes were that his speed of thought increased along with his concentration, but he found that his senses could go far

beyond a human's as well.

Just by closing his eyes and concentrating, he could see and hear things that he couldn't before.

'To think there were so many mana wavelengths I wasn't aware of all around me... '

He felt it in the water, the air, and even through sound.

Just as light and soundwaves bounced off of solid objects, so too did mana wavelengths.

Shin YuSung was the first hunter able to feel mana wavelengths in such ways.

'With this strength... '

Mana Resonance, something only possible when mana wavelengths were matched—something that rarely ever happened—was entirely controllable if you had Super Senses.

Mana Resonance was a strength that allowed you to dismiss anything with a foundation in mana.

'No hunter has succeeded in this before... '

Shin YuSung had gotten a taste of the six senses because he'd been training using his Heightened Focus Trait.

He obtained [Super Sense Awakening] by applying those experiences in the Room of Time, so you could say that [Super Sense Awakening] was a Trait that Shin YuSung had obtained thanks to his experience.

'This is the only card I have that can counter my noona's
'Telekinesis'...'

He wasn't worried about his potential rivals in the International Competition. Rather, the monster he wanted to surpass was the Shin-

oh family's beast that hadn't shown her true strength to anyone.

Since HaYoon had expressed her interest in obtaining him, he wouldn't be able to avoid a direct match.

'She hid her true strength from the family's patriarch. There's probably no one who knows her real limit.'

The Shin-oh family's only rank 7, Shin KangYoon, and Yu MinSeo, the only rank 7 of the side branch families...

HaYoon had even hidden her strength from them. That's how meticulous Shin HaYoon's personality had been since birth—she never showed her teeth until she was ready to devour her opponent.

Not only that, but her Trait was Telekinesis.

It was very versatile for fighting and encompassed attack, defense, close-range, and long-range.

She was the worst possible opponent for YuSung since he had to close the gap in order to be effective.

'I must polish the 5th form as quickly as possible.'

With that concluding thought, YuSung got up from the open-air bath. Maybe it was because he'd immersed himself in a hot bath, or maybe it was because he'd finished organizing his thoughts, but his body felt lighter.

* * *

Swoosh-

YuSung was wearing a bathrobe and drying his hair. Perhaps it was due to how hot the open-air bath was, but his face was redder than normal.

As if she had foreseen even that, Sumire carefully handed him

something.

"YuSung! Here...!" She handed him his favorite banana milk.

"Ah, this..."



YuSung's face brightened as he took the banana milk from Sumire.

"It's good to hydrate yourself after a bath..." Sumire smiled at him.

"It isn't good to drink something sweet before dinner... but still, YuSung, you really like banana milk!" Sumire was the kind of person that even cared about the small details.

"Thank you, Sumire!" The scent of the banana and its sweet taste spread through his mouth.

Sumire covered her mouth and flinched a bit while looking at how happy he looked as he drank the banana milk.

'YuSung is c-cute... '

He was so strong that it was hard to believe he was still a student, but he was too pure in other aspects; that's why Sumire wanted to take care of YuSung.

"YuSung~ When are you coming? I'm hungry." EunAh's voice could be heard from a distance.

"Ah!" Sumire said as if she'd forgotten something. "YuSung... do you prefer noodles or rice?"

Sumire had prepared Sokijiru—a traditional Okinawan dish with pork radish and kelp boiled along with soy sauce.

She had been thinking of making dinner for YuSung with either noodles or rice as a base...

"I like both."

But Shin YuSung's choice was both.

"To think like that..." Sumire mumbled with a serious expression on her face to his response.

It was dumb to think Shin YuSung would choose between the two.

Sumire nodded as if she'd learned something, and then she smiled brightly and spoke.

"Then, YuSung...! We'll be waiting at the table!

* * * *

England's Clock Tower Academy resembled a castle from the middle ages and had a prominent, huge clock at its peak.

A lot of hunters had come out of the Clock Tower Academy. It was an institution that every citizen in the United Kingdom knew about and was a proud symbol of London.

Still, there were beings in England that were more famous than the Clock Tower Academy.

The first was the Witch Aris who, along with the Fist King and Sword God, used to be called one of the strongest hunters in the world.

The second was the only apprentice of the Witch who, despite being just a 1st-year, had become Clock Tower Academy's strongest student and had received the 'Oracle' title—Lorelei Cornet.

"Are you sure...?" a clear voice asked.

Lorelai, her eyes closed, stood up. Her beautiful, tidy blond hair bounced with her movements.

"Yes. It's information from the United Kingdom's Hunter Association. The next opponent will be Korea."

Sebastian, her party member, treated her with the utmost respect—it was as if he were dealing with royalty.

He wasn't wrong. There, at least, Lorelei was like royalty. She received the love of not only the people of London but also from people all over the United Kingdom.

She was the only heir of the UK's national hero, the Witch, and she was the UK hunter world's hope.

How she managed to get to the top of the Clock Tower Academy despite being a 1st-year student was proof of that.

"I see. Korea... So it's Korea."

At Lorelei's mumble, Angela spoke in a serious tone. "Hmm? Ms. Lorelei, is something bothering you?"

Card Magician Sebastian and Angela, the Hand That Didn't Let Go.

Rather than party members, they looked like Lorelei's servants, but it wasn't her doing. They were loyal to her because they wanted to be. Lorelei, who looked weak on the outside, had a certain charismatic strength.

"Angela, no... there aren't any problems."

[Lorelei, your master has a dream.]

She thought back to that first moment.

[It's something only you can achieve...]

To think that her master would ask something of her...

She took a disciple and chose her on a whim. Lorelei knew Aris better than anyone.

The Aris Lorelei knew wasn't tied to anything—she was a free person who craved for nothing.

[Even if it's for your master... Please, win. Lorelei, my proud child.]

Such a person had kissed her forehead while making such a request of her.

Lorelei still couldn't forget that moment. Just thinking about that moment made her heart beat faster.

Maybe it was obvious that someone she'd admired for her entire life asking a favor of her would make her happy.

"It's... just that I remember something my master asked of me." Lorelei stared blankly at the watch that was stopped that was on the palm of her hand.

Lorelei's clock had stopped with her forgotten memories, but she didn't fix it.

Although she might be able to fix the watch, she wouldn't be able to fix the time that had passed.

The watch's time had stopped, but time hadn't, so there was no way to reverse her broken self.

The best thing she could do was to be loyal to the present. After putting her watch into her Pocket, Lorelei walked out of Clock Tower Academy.

Tap, tap.

As Lorelei crossed the door's threshold, an overwhelming view unfolded before her.

Lorelei Cornet...

All the students of Clock Tower Academy had lined up for just one 1st-year student. Although Lorelei had walked out, the students maintained silence. Not a sound was heard over the academy—it was one of the Clock Tower Academy's rituals.

Clock Tower Academy's student council president walked out to wish her success in the dungeon.

"Bedrama. Calt. Let blessings accompany the Oracle."

All of the academy's students drew a cross to give a blessing to Lorelei's party—it was their way of cheering and praying for them.

Although they were trying to clear a rank 6 dungeon with a party of only three members, no one seemed nervous for Lorelei.

She just silently walked with her two party members.

Chapter 137

It was midnight, and YuSung, seated in his chair, stared out over the moonlit ocean.

Swoosh!

Rain poured down as if it were about to submerge the island.

Plaf!

The waves broke over something in the distance.

The sound of the falling rain reminded YuSung of his past.

'Many things have changed... '

That wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

YuSung wasn't tied to memories of the past, and it was true that he was glad that he was able to leave the Shin-oh family.

Because he was abandoned by the Shin-oh family that only cared about strength, he was able to meet many good people.

Yu WonHak had taken him in after he had been abandoned at a young age, and YuSung was able to make new friends because he'd been raised properly.

"Ah, YuSung..." Sumire mumbled as she came out and saw him, "I thought you were sleeping..."

She sat in front of YuSung and smiled. As YuSung smiled back at her, she looked out into the rain and spoke.

"It's raining a lot."

"Yes, I'm glad it's raining now. They say it won't rain tomorrow while we're outside."

Although he carried a heavier atmosphere than usual, Shin YuSung still talked about the next day's expedition.

'As expected, YuSung... '

Although YuSung always tried to support them, he never shared his worries with the other party members.

Sumire wanted to know more about YuSung, especially on days like that where he stared silently into the rain.

She wanted to know what YuSung was thinking about and what worried him.

She'd learned from him that being close to someone could bring comfort and strengthen you.

'YuSung was the one who taught me that... '

Sumire felt that it was unfair that she couldn't be of help to him, but she thought that it was too selfish for her to think something like that at the moment, so she tried to put those emotions aside.

"YuSung..." Sumire said his name as if she were possessed.

"What, Sumire?"

As YuSung turned his head from the window and looked at her, Sumire's heart began beating faster. "What? N-no. It's just that..."

Sumire ended up stuttering and then gave her usual, nervous smile.

"I... I wanted to tell you that... I'm thankful."

She wanted to get closer and talk about deeper things, but she ended up burying such wishes.

"I'm also thankful."

Seeing him smiling back at her, Sumire thought, 'I'm okay with this... for the moment.'

* * *

The sunlight shone through the window, and EunAh woke up as she messed with her hair.

"Yawn..." Yawning, she walked out to the living room.

The lodging was too silent.

"Guys...?"

She rubbed her eyes and looked around the lodging, but she couldn't see Sumire or YuSung anywhere.

The only thing she could see was an omurice covered with a wrap.

[Please, eat breakfast!]

[By Sumire, who appreciates Miss EunAh more than anyone ♥]

"Where did they go...? Why didn't they take me?"

Although she complained a bit, Kim EunAh ate all the omurice that Sumire had prepared.

* * * *

Tap, tap!

Sumire patted her nervous cheeks; then she checked the information

on her Pocket.

[Boss Name: Racule of the Black Cape]

[※ Warning: Its Trait is too strong, so I should check it out beforehand and be careful! I could suffer a great loss... (◡̈◡̈)ππ]

[Trait: Blessing of the Abandoned Princess]

[Effect: Every 24 hours, a buff or a debuff will be applied on Racule alternately. Some of the buffs can double its mana and physical capability. Among the debuffs, there's one that reduces its fighting capability by 50%. A 4x difference! (◡̈◡̈◡̈◡̈) /]

It was the only undead dungeon on the Five Islands.

The boss of the abandoned castle was Racule of the Black Cape. Besides the time they collaborated with Japan, Sumire hadn't faced a rank 5 boss before.

Not only that, but she would be facing him alone for training.

YuSung wasn't going to participate. Rather, he would just watch from a distance.

"If I think you're having a hard time, I'll enter the fight."

Sumire nodded at Shin YuSung's words.

"Yes! Leave it to me!"

Although the opponent was a rank 5 boss, Sumire wasn't worried. Not only that, but she was telling herself that she could win.

'Racule has received the debuff, and this is an undead dungeon. This situation... is in my favor. I can do it.'

Thinking that, Sumire looked at YuSung's face; then she opened the door.

Creak!!

The rusty door opened.

Black Knight Racule knelt before an abandoned throne.

"Who is it... That has awoken me from my dream?"

He was an unlucky knight who had turned undead and roamed for eternity from the guilt of having not been able to protect his princess—a rank 5 boss.

Sumire felt chills run down her spine at Racule's killing intent, but she glared at him and placed her hand on her hairpin.

At the same time, the world stopped.

A black cloud covered Sumire's sight before fading away.

- Long time no see.

The abandoned castle had turned into Laplace's castle.

- To think that the opponent is a rank 5 boss... You've grown quite a lot.

Laplace, who had appeared suddenly, smiled seductively.

"Yes? N-no! This... Is all thanks to the strength you lent me, Ms. Laplace."

Sumire quickly shook her hands and tried to act humble.

- Fufu, my child. Our resonance is your talent, and having met me is your luck.

Laplace smiled at Sumire in satisfaction, but that only lasted a short while before she sighed.

- But you're also having quite a hard time. To think you'd have someone as dense as him in your heart. We're also similar in that sense...

Sumire realized a bit late who Laplace was talking about.

"What?! N-no! How could someone like me... It... it's nothing like that! I just really... want to be of help!"

Laplace smiled mischievously at Sumire getting flustered and covered her mouth.

- Really? Fufu. Let's leave it like that, then. After all, what happens is none of my concern.

Laplace made Sumire sit on her throne.

- It's been a while since we last met, but let's leave the conversation here. My child... Use my strength as much as you want.

* * * *

WHOOM-

An ominous black energy surrounded the castle and slowly dissipated.

Sumire slowly appeared on her throne.

Racule raised his sword and shouted, "Mortal! With your death... I will honor the princess with your death!"

Sumire just gave him a sultry smile.

Swoosh-

She crossed her legs and looked down at Racule. Sumire had unlocked her strength through Laplace's throne, and the undead knelt at the appearance of the true queen.

"Worship our master..."

Lilith felt a thrill as Laplace's strength became visible.

"For the mas... ter... I'll win this war."

Kneeling before her, the death knight also praised Sumire.

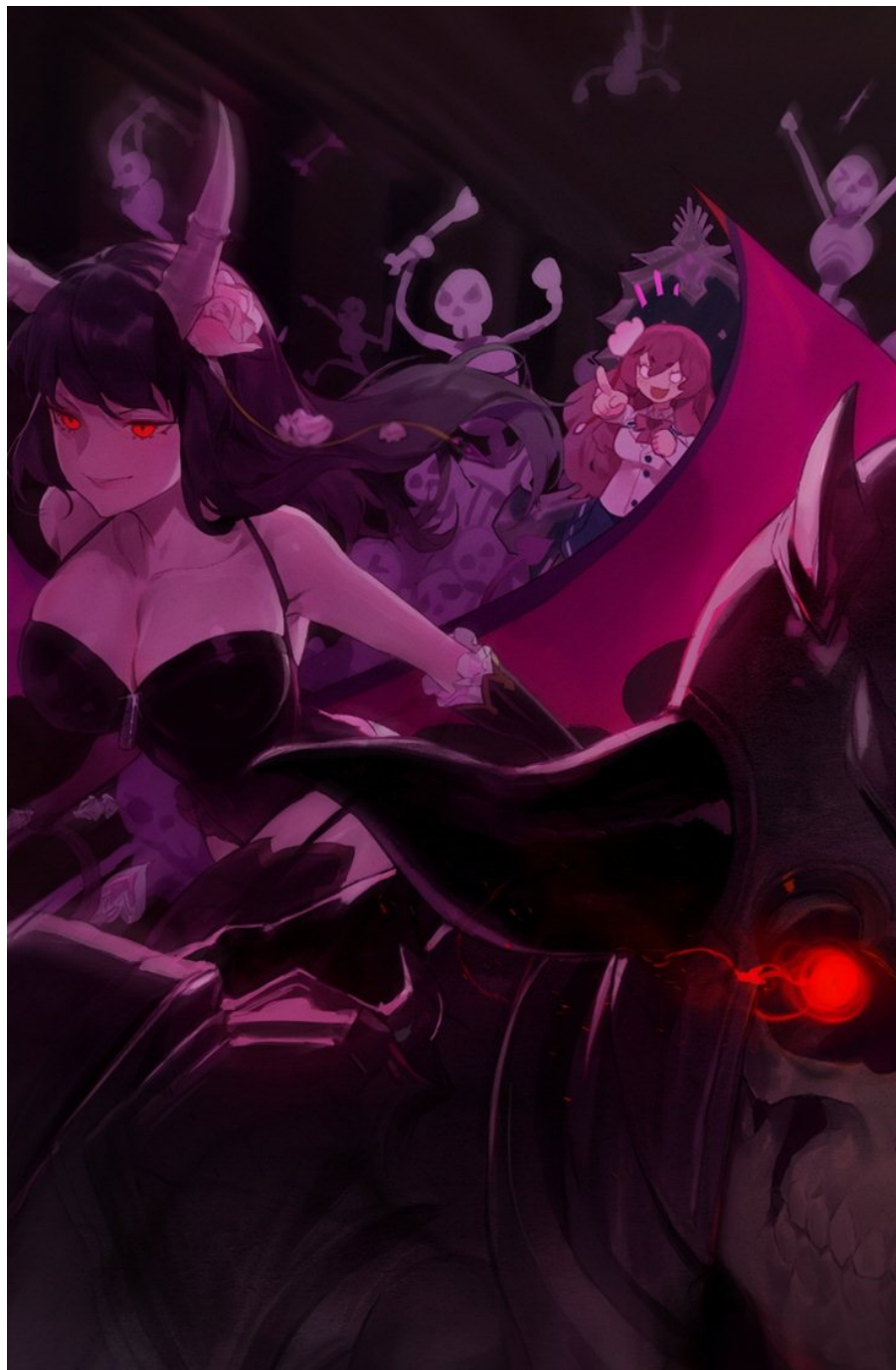
Side- tap, tap.

Sumire got up from the throne and slowly walked down. Ghouls appeared from the ground and began to cry out loud, and the skeletons clacked their jaws.

They were all happy at the queen coming down, but the queen's order was short and concise.

"Everyone... Attack!"

Sumire raised her index finger and pointed to Racule. As if the army of the undead had been waiting for her orders, they rushed toward Racule in a wave.



Chapter 138

BOOM!

Fire poured in every direction, and fragments from the skeletons rained down every time Racule swung his giant sword.

Racule was a berserker who only got stronger as he became more immersed in a fight, so he displayed immense power against Sumire's army of undead.

[The opponent is under the effect of a debuff.]

[Name: Blessing of the Cursed Princess]

[Effect: Combat power will be decreased by 50% for 24 hours.]

Sumire was just giving a relaxed smile as she looked at the hologram. She had already researched information on Racule before entering the dungeon.

Every 24 hours, the curse and blessing changed. With a buff, Racule could face a rank 6 as long as it wasn't a named boss, but the debuff was one that decreased its combat power.

BOOM! Clang! Clang!

"No one...! Will be able to take control of this castle...! No matter what they try!" a mournful voice cried out from Racule's armor.

Sumire sat on her throne with an elegant atmosphere as she watched the battle; then she raised her index finger.

Swoosh-

Particles of the hologram scattered away, and a ring appeared on her index finger. Sumire smiled and extended her hand.

"The darkness shall cover the sun," the queen's clear voice rang out over the room.

The Trait Laplace offered Sumire was too special.

[The Witch's Dark Magic can borrow more strength from the fragment.]

[The Witch's Dark Magic is fortifying the dark clouds of despair.]

[The Witch's Dark Magic is fortifying the familiar spirits.]

Laplace's Trait was fortifying her original Trait, her artifacts, and even the skill inside it.

As the clouds of despair covered the ceilings of the abandoned castle, a blue light began emanating from her skeletons' eyes.

"Rise."

Sumire raised her hands into the air, and the fragmented skeletons began rising again, and ghouls clawed their way up through the ground.

There didn't seem to be an end to Sumire's mana—she just looked at her familiar spirits fight in a relaxed manner.

"The strength of the Master...! I can feel it!"

"Strength... is... overflowing..."

Lilith and the death knight, whom Sumire was fond of, shouted excitedly.

Racule kept getting weaker, and Sumire's familiar spirits had become stronger.

Slash!! Swish!

"Fufu! With... such a slow sword... you won't be able to reach Master."

Although Lilith wasn't a familiar spirit that was good at fighting, she was fighting on equal terms against Racule.

"YOU!" a deathly scream spread from Racule's armor.

It wouldn't have been weird for a student to have run in fear from it, but Sumire's army was fearless.

The army of the undead pushed forward like a wave.

While the ghouls and skeletons were pouring down on him and Lilith restrained his movements with a whip, the death knight's greatsword smashed Racule's head.

BOOM!

Paf! Boom!

It was an impact that was hard to handle, even for a boss.

Racule fell to his knees, and his armor impacted the floor.

WHOOM-!

Black energy poured from the collapsed Racule. At the same time, his black cape started to turn red.

YuSung, who had been looking from a distance for Sumire's safety, changed his posture to a more relaxed one.

"The second phase..."

Slide- Boom!

Racule tossed his armor aside.

He was unlocking the true strength of the berserker warrior that had been suppressed. Unlike most rank 5 bosses, Racule had the rare pattern of 'Awakening'.

'This could be dangerous.'

Grab-

YuSung prepared himself just in case and clenched his fists. As he did that, Sumire grabbed his hand.

"Y-you can't. YuSung..."

"Sumire?"

The sultry smile she'd shown before was nowhere to be seen. Sumire smiled like an innocent sheep, but it was still different from her usual smile.

Slide-

She grabbed YuSung's hand and pulled him toward her. She usually would have been too embarrassed to do such a thing.

"I cannot allow you to dirty your hands on something like this."

Sumire made YuSung sit on Laplace's throne. If she was the queen of the undead, the one she followed was her party leader, Shin YuSung.

Slide-

Sumire sat on YuSung's thighs, pulled her body close to his, and gave him an intense look.

"I'll deal with that guy, so... YuSung, could you believe in me and stay here?"



* * *

As Sumire touched his face with her hands, YuSung nodded.

"Okay."

He always believed in his party members, so listening to Sumire's request wasn't hard.

"Sumire, I believe in you."

YuSung smiled at her. Sumire grinned ecstatically, and then she kissed YuSung on his cheek.

"Then I'll be back soon."

The seductive Queen of the undead changed into a pure bunny only in front of YuSung. Sumire's attitude reflected her usual feelings, but that only applied in front of YuSung.

Pang!

Racule had Awakened and entered his 2nd phase.

Red energy that represented the energy of a berserker flowed from Racule's eyes.

"I'll cut off your head and put it on display here!" Racule, covered in mad energy, rushed toward Sumire.

It was common sense that to stop an army of the undead, one would have to kill the necromancer, Sumire.

Plaf!

Lilith's whip wrapped around Racule's right hand.

"Where are you going?"

"I'll... protect... Master..."

BPP!

The death knight threw his greatsword and grabbed Racule with both arms. It was common knowledge that although necromancers could control familiar spirits with mana, they weren't good in hand-to-hand combat.

That's why Racule targeted Sumire, but Sumire, who had Laplace's favor, was different.

Swoosh!

Sumire, just like Laplace—who had fought alongside her familiar spirits against the hunters—was also good at fighting.

Slash!

Black energy cut through Racule's chest. It was as if a portal had suddenly torn the space apart.

"Th-this?"

Racule looked down at the black energy, Laplace's strength that Sumire's mana had processed, covering his chest.

Rather than a skill, it was a type of mana conversion based on Laplace's Dark Magic.

Laplace's strength and Sumire were a blessed combination.

Sumire's body overflowed with mana, and because of her natural-born talent, she could quickly convert it.

Laplace's strength allowed Sumire to use her Talent to her full extent and gave her speed and strength.

Grab!

Sumire made a cold smile; then she clenched her fist as if she were making something explode—it was a technique that was like a death sentence to Racule.

Paf!!

Sumire's black energy pierced Racule's body like he was a pincushion.

Although the opponent was a rank 5 boss under the effect of a debuff, she'd shown an overwhelming difference in strength.

BOOM!

As Racule collapsed, the skeletons raised their arms to celebrate the victory.

[You've defeated Racule.]

Sumire walked toward the boss.

[A powerful source of strength has been detected from Racule's corpse.]

[You can use the source to activate the Witch's Authority.]

[First Authority: Animate Dead]

[Effect: You can use the strength of the deceased to create a familiar spirit.]

[Second Authority: Undead Fusion]

[Effect: You can fuse the strength of the deceased with a familiar spirit.]

Animate Dead...

Undead Fusion...

Both skills could only be used when you defeated a rank 5 boss or higher.

Still, it was a scam-like skill that allowed you to get stronger as you hunted bosses. As the queen of the undead, Sumire used the authority.

"I think that the second authority is going to be good because I already have a good knight."

Swoosh!

As Sumire moved her hand, Racule's strength rose to the sky like a firefly and then entered the death knight's body.

"C-Cough! This...! This... strength!"

Pang!

The death knight was unsummoned and disappeared.

[Undead Fusion activated.]

[Death Knight X Dark Knight Racule]

[The death knight has been reborn through Racule's strength.]

[You will not know the result until the fusion is over.]

[Remaining Time: 48 hours.]

At the same time, a hologram rose into the sky.

"Congratulations on your victory, Master."

While being saluted by Lilith and the undead, Sumire walked toward YuSung.

That time, Sumire sat on YuSung and placed her head against him.

"I did a good job... so... can you praise me?"

Sumire tapped on her head as if she were a dog waiting to be praised by her master. It was a behavior Sumir would've otherwise never done without Laplace's influence, but she was more honest with herself when it was active, so she wasn't embarrassed.

'Then... since the battle is over... '

YuSung was trying to take out her hair ornament as always, but Sumire grabbed his hands.

"That's cheating," Sumire pouted.

'I guess I have no other choice... '

In the end, YuSung stroked Sumire's hair just as she wanted.

"Ah, hehehe..." Sumire became really happy and grinned while making weird sounds.

Shin YuSung just smiled at her.

Chapter 139

The monster had goat horns sticking from its head, a red mana stone on its forehead, sharp teeth that could even easily crunch through steel, and a snake instead of a right arm.

Lorelei looked down at the figure that had collapsed at her feet.

"This end doesn't suit a being with the grandiose title of a 'demon king'."

It was a rank 6 boss.

Demon King Andromalius was ranked 72, so he was one of the weakest, but he was still a demon king.

Their trump card was stuck on Andromalius's head.

"It's all thanks to your strength, Lorelei." Angela bowed her head.

"That's right. We just offered the support that would be expected of students. We were able to hunt Andromalius thanks to you, Lorelei." Sebastian smiled at her.

They gave Lorelei all the achievements. Those weren't vain words—they came from a real admiration for Lorelei.

At that moment, Andromalius's corpse moved its finger.

Wiggle.

Fwish- Paf!

Sebastian threw a card toward the demon king's neck and confirmed it was dead. Even against a corpse, he kept his guard up.

Just a year prior, Sebastian had never imagined he'd join someone's party, but that was a story of the past.

Sebastian looked at Lorelei with admiration.

'How embarrassing. Before I met her, I thought I was the best.'

Ability, personality, and background—their party leader was perfect in all senses.

But that wasn't why Sebastian and Angela admired Lorelei. Lorelei was the second person who'd managed to complete the 'Clock Tower's Trial'. Her achievements couldn't be compared to meaningless things like that.

"There's no need to be arrogant... This is all thanks to the artifacts that Ms. Aris provided me." Lorelei looked at a steel ball that was flying around her like a bee.

Brr-! Brr!

The steel ball was a unique-rank artifact, the 'Saint's Sphere.' If you unlocked the holy strength sealed inside it, it flitted about for seven days and emitted holy light.

"This artifact can drive out evil..."

Just like Lorelei said, it debuffed evil Traits.

It could reduce the fighting capability of devils by 50% and in the case of the demon kings, who were pure-blooded devils, by 60%.

When it came to undead, which were basically corpses, it could even reduce their fighting capabilities by 80%.

Angela smiled happily at the 'Saint's Sphere.'

"That's great news. One of Korea's party members is a necromancer! With this artifact... Fufu!"

Lorelei didn't reply to Angela's words. The reason why Lorelei focused so much on getting stronger was for Aris, and that's why Lorelei had always tried to make things as fair as possible. She was proud of her ability, after all.

Still, Sumire was a frightening opponent.

Lorelei wasn't sure whose fragment Sumire had absorbed, but after seeing her fight against Japan, Lorelei realized she'd almost reached the source of strength.

'Beating Korea... Is Ms. Aris's desire.'

Therefore, losing wasn't an option.

She had to use every card available to her. After all, the other party could also use artifacts.

The Saint's Sphere was an artifact with a time restriction of a week.

If they sealed Sumire's undead, that would be like a two-on-three fight.

'Ms. Aris... Are you really okay with a result like that?'

To be honest, she didn't like it.

She wanted to beat Korea with her own skills and defeat the Fist King's disciple as the proud disciple of the Dark Witch.

'I... can do it.'

Lorelei closed her eyes.

She'd even cleared the Trial of the Clock Tower to be able to become Aris's heir. She'd made it through that mind-melting time not because she craved strength or fame, but for Aris—to be able to become similar to Aris, who was stronger and more beautiful than anyone else, to be able to become her pride, to be able to become the light in

the dark she admired.

'If it's for Ms. Aris... '

Lorelei could beat anyone.

* * *

Sunlight poured from the sky.

Gulp.

Kim EunAh gulped.

'Do you think I won't be able to do it...?'

A Trait detection paper was wrapped around Kim EunAh's arms. In reality, it was usually used by city guards to investigate crime scenes.

[What if I hunt it with electricity and lie?]

[EunAh, traces will be left on this paper if you use your Trait.]

[on this paper...?]

The paper was going to support Kim EunAh's training of [Hunting a monster without using your Trait].

BOOM!

"GRR! GRR-!"

Kim EunAh's opponent was a rank 2 monster, a Crokison. It was a monster that had crocodile-like skin—a low-ranking monster she could easily defeat by using electricity.

But to improve Kim EunAh's reaction speed and close-range fighting skills, she had to hunt the Crokison without using her electricity.

"C-come! Bring it on!"

Tap!

Kim EunAh threw a stone.

"GRR!"

The provocation was a success.

The Crokison looked into the sky and let out heavy breaths; then, it stomped the ground and began to rush forward.

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!

'How crazy. Did YuSung really beat such a monster at 9 years of age with his bare hands?'

It was a story that seemed to belong to a myth or a legend, but when she thought about the fight between Adela and YuSung, she couldn't help but accept it.

'A 9-year-old kid could do it, so why wouldn't I be able to do that?'

Kim EunAh was making a resolution in a fight against a rank 2 monster.

'I'll win! No matter how!'

* * * *

She spent 5 minutes running, 15 minutes dodging its attacks, and 30 minutes on a hill and then hiding behind a tree.

EunAh had been fighting the Crokison for an hour.

It was a fight between two prideful genius.

Their fierce battle continued, the winner hard to pick out. After a bit longer, the victor emerged. As expected, there couldn't be two suns in the sky.

"Haa! Haa... I... I! Hehe!" EunAh breathed heavily while lowering her body. She looked at the unconscious Crokison.

"I won! I beat a rank 2 monster!" Kim EunAh shouted excitedly while looking down at the Crokison.

Kim EunAh's voice echoed throughout the forest. "I... I really..."

Moved, Kim EunAh sat down. To think that she'd beat a rank 2 monster. At first, she thought it was an impossible challenge—she even thought of giving up and using electricity.

But she didn't give up and managed to dodge the Crokison's attacks and make it fall down the hill.

"I won..."

WHOOM-!

Kim EunAh raised her hand, lifted her head, and looked at the paper around her wrist—it was as blue as the sky.

That was proof that EunAh hadn't given up and that she had given it her all.

The sunlight shining down was celebrating EunAh's crappy victory.

* * * *

Sumire and YuSung smiled at each other, but Laplace's annoyed voice came out from the hair ornament.

- Waiting two days just to absorb strength...?

Laplace didn't seem to like how long it would take for the death

knight to absorb Racule's strength.

Paf!

A hologram appeared from the Pocket.

[The Witch of Disaster, Laplace, has given the death knight the name of 'Darren'.]

The witch giving a familiar spirit a name was a sort of spell.

- There's a strength in a name.

[The death knight has received the name 'Darren'.]

[Darren and Racule's compatibility has increased to 99%.]

[Darren's rank has increased and he has become a higher-rank being, a Durahan.]

[Familiar Spirit: Darren]

[Durahan of Despair (Passive Skill) - Lifts the fighting spirit of nearby undead and increases their fighting capability. Has a high charisma and a commanding role in a war.]

[Dark Knight's Oath (Skill) - The stats of the familiar spirit increase when it's near its master. The effect is higher the more loyal it is toward the master.]

Laplace gave another gift to Sumire. A magic circle appeared on the ground, and then Death Knight Darren was summoned.

"I'll only serve Master."

Darren knelt, holding his helmeted head.

Sumire walked toward Darren and placed her hand on his head for the pledge. "Yes... Darren, Let's keep up the good work from now on."

Sumire smiled at Darren, who'd become a Durahan.

SWOOSH!!

A huge amount of mana flowed from Sumire to Darren—the contract between the two renewing since he'd become a new familiar spirit.

As the contract between the two succeeded, Sumire's body trembled slightly from how much mana she'd just used.

"Ah...?!"

Tap.

"Sumire, are you okay?" YuSung caught her before she could fall.

"Ah! I'm okay... This much is nothing!"

Sumire seemed really happy that YuSung was worried about her.

"Your body can hurt when you use such a huge amount of mana, so don't overdo yourself." YuSung was proud of Sumire, his party member.

'To think that she'd defeat a rank 5 boss alone... On top of that, Sumire's fully using Laplace's strength.'

She had a huge amount of mana and mental strength. She was comparable to an active rank 5 hunter, and no normal student could be a match for her.

She had an artifact, Laplace's fragment, and strong familiar spirits like Darren and Lilith.

YuSung needed strong party members to be able to surpass his master, the Fist King, and become the world's strongest.

'With Sumire's potential, she can definitely become stronger than master's partners... '

After finding a gem called Sumire, Shin YuSung was trying to polish her into the best jewel possible.

If YuSung was a hunter raised by Yu WonHak, Sumire was a hunter raised by YuSung.

That's why Shin YuSung's emotions regarding Sumire were a bit more special than simple affection toward a party member.

"Ah, should I carry you on my back, Sumire?" YuSung boldly proposed. At that one proposal, Sumire couldn't control her facial expression.

"Me...?!" Sumire was so happy that she subconsciously straightened.

Paf! Tap!

Lilith and Darren, who weren't quick to catch on, quickly interrupted.

"No! Master! I, Lilith, will hold you in my arms! Fly with me..."

"Give me that honor... To me, Darren..."

Sumire looked at her familiar spirits with cold eyes as black energy leaked from her—she was telling them not to interrupt.

Sumire's personality had changed a bit after she'd unlocked Laplace's strength.

"E-EEK? N-no! Now that I think about it, I'm also a bit tired..."

"M-my thoughts were rude!"

In the end, Lilith and Darren stepped back.

Sumire smiled at YuSung while holding onto his clothes.

"Then, could I ask you...?"

Since they'd finished all the training, YuSung was planning to return to Gaon Academy's dorms with the party members, so Sumire would be able to cling to his back for quite a long time. It was an unexpected luxury for her.

Tap.

When he picked her up on his back, Sumire carefully wrapped her arms around his body.

"What do you want to eat when we return to the Academy tomorrow night...?" Sumire's sweet voice sounded from his back, but what made him react was the question about the menu.

"Yakitori with chicken...? Or curry as usual?"



A Japanese-style skewer, yakitori or Sumire's curry, made with her heart.

YuSung couldn't possibly decide between the two.

'I wonder how it would taste if you put yakitori on top of the curry...?
I think it would be delicious.'

Despite Sumire's affectionate attack, YuSung fell into thought about the food. Then, with a serious voice, he answered, "Both, please."

He'd spent 12 years stuck on a mountain and hadn't seen anyone of the opposite gender during all those years.

YuSung was still too pure.

Chapter 140

After almost a week of training, all of the party members gathered in Gaon Academy's club room.

[2siWoo: I've been practicing shooting recently, so I feel like I've recovered quite a bit of my senses. I have my confidence back.]

[2siWoo: Sakura's skills are no joke. Thanks to her, I've improved quite a lot. I also want to show you my shooting skills.]

[2siWoo: I want to return soon. YuSung, how are you doing? I'll be back before the International Competition resumes.]

Lee SiWoo's place was empty—he still hadn't returned from Japan.

'SiWoo... '

Shin YuSung felt troubled.

When Lee SiWoo told him he would go to Japan, he'd wondered if he should stop him, but he stopped when he saw the motivation in SiWoo's eyes.

'His eyes were like mine when I was on Martial Spirits' Mountain... '

YuSung wrote his reply while thinking about SiWoo.

[Shin YuSung: I'll be waiting.]

Although the reply was short, it was more than enough. The empty space on the sofa belonged to SiWoo, so as the party leader, YuSung was just going to wait for him.

Tap!

At that moment, the club room door opened, and Amy extended her arms.

"Buaa! Party leader! I missed you!" Amy ran in with two paper bags.

EunAh stopped Amy with her hand. "Stop. If you keep acting like this~ I'll forget your face."

EunAh looked at her while narrowing her eyes for not having gone to the Five Island practice, and Amy covered her mouth while making a shocked expression.

"EunAh. Did you begin hating me for my busy schedule?" Amy dropped the paper bags and collapsed onto the sofa.

"No, just... I'll forget your face. I never said I was going to hate you." As Kim EunAh's weak heart made her waver, Amy smiled in satisfaction.

"Hehe~ Right?"

Amy made EunAh fall into her pace and then slowly began walking toward YuSung.

"Hehe, party leader. Long time no see! Haa, I should have some time with the party leader..."

"What you're doing now is more than enough. I was able to obtain as many votes as Adela... thanks to you, Amy," YuSung said, a smile on his face.

Amy gave him two thumbs up and moved a moved expression. "You're handsome even on the inside...! As expected, you're the best party leader! Although..."

She stopped talking and took a glimpse at EunAh before making a mischievous expression. "I can understand why EunAh is complaining. After all, if I weren't this busy, we could've gotten even closer!"

Amy rubbed her cheeks on EunAh's arms.

"EunAh, I made a decision. I won't go on tour for a while. That was too tiring, and I missed Korean food. Now that I think about it... Is... is this a perfume bottle?!" As expected from a streamer, she was talking non-stop.

"What? A perfume bottle. You're American."

"Come on~ EunAh! I'm half. I'm at least half Korean~"

Although they bickered a lot, they seemed close.

EunAh called up an image on her Pocket. "Check this out."

Paf!

Kim EunAh had taken a picture of herself making a V-pose before the collapsed Crockison.

"Aren't I amazing? I caught this alone. Although it took me an hour... Haa, the last moment was truly thrilling."

Amy made a bitter smile as she looked at the picture.

"This is just a normal rank 2 monster... And there's no way hunting this would have taken her an hour... '

[Image]

Amy fell into thought.

What was so impressive about hunting a rank 2 monster when she'd hunted a rank 4 Lake Dragon?

"Ah, yes... Impressive. Did you hunt the rank 2 alone?"

"YuSung trained me. Although I've struggled a lot, I definitely became stronger."

"Ah... I... I see. It's because you become stronger... Ah, but two people

are missing. SiWoo is in Japan, but what about Sumire?"

"Ah... Sumire?"

Amy silently pointed toward the kitchen.

* * *

Sumire silently stirred the curry.

In reality, there wasn't much to do regarding the curry, but Sumire didn't dare look at YuSung.

"U-ugh... Wh-why did I do that to YuSung...?"

The more she thought of what she'd done the day before, the more embarrassed she became.

[I did a good job... so could you praise me?]

She'd tried to act cute so that he would stroke her head.

[That's unfair.]

She had even pouted.

[Then could I ask you...?]

After that, she'd confidently gotten on YuSung's back.

[YuSung, your back is quite warm.]

She'd even murmured into his ears.

"It... It seems like I've gone crazy."

The more Sumire thought of what happened, the redder she became. She wanted to say that it wasn't her who'd done that, but that excuse

didn't work anymore since Laplace had told her the truth.

[Well, explaining why your personality changes after you accept my strength is quite simple... It's just that you became more honest with your desires.]

Sumire's confident atmosphere when she used Laplace's strength and her shy atmosphere were both parts of her personality.

Her low self-esteem disappeared due to Laplace's strength—it wasn't that her personality became that of another person.

That meant that everything she'd done was her own doing.

Acting cute so he would stroke her hair, being carried on his back, and murmuring in her ears in a sweet voice—those were all things Sumire wanted.

'Then, as expected, I... '

As Sumire's thoughts reached that place, her nose turned completely red.

It was a secret she hadn't revealed to anyone, but she'd thought about what it would be like to become one family with YuSung.

He was kinder than anyone—someone she could truly admire.

Having a destiny of falling in love, becoming family and waking up next to each other every morning, eating breakfast with children that looked like him, murmuring sweet things at night to him, and falling asleep with him... How nice would that be?

Sumire kept stirring the curry with a blank expression on her face.

'YuSung is kind... So I'm sure that being together would make the house warmer.'

Sumire quickly gave up on her thoughts.

YuSung and her were party members; she thought that there was too much distance between them.

'I'm sure that, for YuSung, someone like me... '

To Sumire, YuSung was too perfect, so she was happy to just be his party member.

Going through things as members of the same party, joining hands to get through problems, and him eating delicious food she made...

'That's why I shouldn't be greedy... '

Sumire was smiling bitterly when...

"Sumire."

YuSung entered the kitchen because she had been in there alone for so long, although she was making the same curry as usual.

"Can I help you with something?"

"What? N-no! I'm almost done. If you go back to the sofa and wait a bit more..."

Sumire quickly waved her hand and YuSung replied, "No. I'm going to stay here."

"What...?" Sumire was surprised by his firm answer.

He kept talking. "Being by yourself is lonely, right?"

Sumire ended up laughing. At that moment, she finally discovered why she began harboring such emotions and why she'd acted like that.

"As expected, YuSung..."

It wasn't any grandiose reason.

"You're... really, kind."

Sumire smiled brightly at him.

Chapter 141

A heavy atmosphere hung over the room.

Amy played the video she'd prepared on the Pocket, and Lorelei's beautiful golden eyes shone from the depths of a gloomy castle.

[The light will judge the darkness...]

As Lorelei extended her hand, an intense light poured out from the Saint's Sphere next to her.

Swoosh!

The devils began screaming. The undead and skeletons collapsed after being burned by the light.

"Th-this..."

"It's shocking. Right? Haa," Amy sighed at Sumire's reaction.

"That's a unique-ranked item."

"What?! A unique?" EunAh was surprised by the word 'unique'.

"Something that can only be used for seven days... was used by a student?"

EunAh's reaction was understandable. The ranking of unique items was one step higher than rare ones—they were important treasures that could be used on high floors of the Tower.

"There's the rank 6 dungeon and the International Competition..."

Everyone focused on Sumire. It might not be for the other students,

but the Saint's Sphere was fatal for a necromancer like Sumire.

Sumire looked at YuSung; then she clenched her fist.

"S-still... I'm going to do my best..."

"No, Sumire." YuSung stopped her. "I cannot accept that," he said in a firm tone.

YuSung read her the recorded effect of the Saint's Sphere.

"The undead that the Saint's Sphere hits permanently lose 80% of their fighting power."

There was no way an undead would be okay after being hit by such an intense light made of mana. Darren the Duraharan and the Succubus Lilith were familiar spirits with whom he'd made contracts, so having their fighting capability cut would be fatal for Sumire.

"Even if we win this match, it would be pointless if you permanently lost your ability to fight."

Sumire nodded at YuSung's explanation.

Amy patted her back and consoled her. "Yes, Sumire. Just like the party leader said, take a break this time. The opponent seems like too bad of a match."

The atmosphere turned serious.

EunAh sighed as she looked at them. "Okay. Then if YuSung and I enter, who will fill Sumire's place?"

Gulp.

Amy gulped and began laughing. Although Amy was in Class A, thanks to the characteristic of her Trait, she wasn't a Seven.

"A-as expected... Okay! I'll show you. I, the prize of Gaon!"

Amy gathered courage not as a streamer but as a hunter.

EunAh laughed at her and then said something that hurt her. "There's no way you're Gaon's prize. Adela destroyed you in two seconds."

"U-ugh! That isn't because I'm weak... Adela is too strong..."

The record of two seconds was too short.

YuSung fell into thought. Since Sumire couldn't take part in it, there was someone that YuSung had in mind.

'As expected. The last place... '

* * *

Veloce Aphelion...

She'd become the headmaster of the Clock Tower Academy at the age of 42. She narrowed her eyes at the unexpected guest.

"What brings the headmaster of Gaon Academy here...?"

Despite being indoors, Veloce was wearing sunglasses and smiling. Jin ByungCheol touched his glasses and shouted, "What brings me here? You've become quite shameless in the time since we last met! Did you think I wouldn't hear that you suddenly asked for the International Competition to take place at Clock Tower?!"

The 2nd match of the International Competition was chosen by the UK's Hunter Association to be at Clock Tower Academy, the school Lorelei was attending.

"Hmm? Why are you getting angry? Is that something... to get angry about?"

When he saw Veloce's relaxed smile, Jin ByungCheol smirked and touched his mustache. "Okay. You leave me no choice."

Veloce narrowed her eyes and gave a low hum. "No choice?"

"Yes! It makes no sense to have a match in a dangerous place where you could have hidden anything!"

"That's speculation. I asked for it to be Clock Tower Academy because —"

When Veloce touched her forehead and tried to explain, Jin ByungCheol interrupted.

"Explain this to the investigators! I'm going to tell Association President Kang YuChan myself. You know that YuSung's master has a close relationship with the Association President, right?"

At the mention of investigators and familiar names, Veloce angrily stood up from her seat. "What's wrong with you?! Do you want to make a huge deal out of something so trivial? I just asked that for publicity purposes! School publicity!"

Veloce's attitude changed completely. Although she had authority, she didn't want it to become a fight between Associations.

"Do you want me to believe that?"

"Of course, you have to. Mr. ByungCheol, you're also an educator—just like me. I wouldn't do something as cowardly as that. Did you already forget who I am? Did you forget when we cleared Aphelt Castle?"

Jin ByungCheol's eyes narrowed after Veloce mentioned the past.

She sighed. "A lot of people are going to watch this tournament. It would be a waste to do it in a stadium."

"That isn't something Gaon cares about."

When she heard Jin ByungCheol's explanation, Veloce figured out the situation. She sat properly and then gathered her hands. "It's just for publicity. Wouldn't it be normal for me to want that?"

Veloce showed her index finger and mumbled in a low voice, “Just once”. Her behavior made her almost seem like a Korean.

It was one of the mannerisms she got from hanging out with Jin ByungCheol.

"I already said it. I don't know what kind of tricks Clock Tower Academy has up their sleeve, and our students would be at a clear disadvantage because they don't know the terrain as much as the English students."

Since Jin ByungCheol wasn't letting it pass, Veloce fell into thought.

'There's no way this obstinate guy would let go of this easily... '

Veloce had even given him a piece of advice regarding how obstinate he was.

[You know? People who love fighting don't take time for their wounds to heal.]

It was advice Veloce had given him because he fought all the time, even against higher-ranking people.

Veloce knew Jin ByungCheol's personality very well.

'An arrangement that can make both of us satisfied... '

It seemed like Veloce thought of something. She let out an “ah” and gave another relaxed smile.

"Then let's do this: Send your students before the tournament. Also, send a few teachers so they can inspect the terrain. How about that?"

"The students...?"

As Jin ByungCheol frowned, Veloce returned to her seat with an elegant gait.

Paf.

Headmaster Veloce relaxed her body on a padded chair.

"Why~ Help me this once. It's a good opportunity, right? I'll also give a subsidy to your students and teachers."

If the Clock Tower was where the International Competition would take place, they could stand out in England, which was a country with many prestigious Academies. It wasn't time to save money on stuff like that.

"I'll give all of your students \$50,000 USD and also \$100,000 USD to the teachers that come to investigate.

Jin ByungCheol stared at Veloce. She was insisting so much that she really seemed innocent.

He gave her a warning as Gaon's headmaster. "Veloce... While our students are staying in England, nothing must happen to them, understood?"

Veloce laughed while looking at her ex-partner. "Don't worry. They will receive the best possible treatment as our VIP guests."

* * * *

YuSung, Sumire, EunAh, and Amy...

The four students that represented Gaon and the teachers that expressed their wishes to participate, Lin Xiao and So HaeJung, calmly walked toward the center of Clock Tower Academy.

England's students were making a line, and Amy was surprised at how well-organized they were.

"Check their angles... It seems like they only practice this."

It was a welcome ceremony for the Korean players and a performance

to try to overwhelm them.

Tap, tap, tap-!

As the group in the front walked up and turned their heads toward the entrance, a blond girl came walking toward them with calm steps.

England's princess...

The Disciple of the Witch...

The Clock Tower's Oracle...

Unlike her grandiose titles, Lorelei was a small girl, like a doll.

She had a blank face that didn't seem to have any emotions.

Lorelei greeted Korea's representative, YuSung. "I'm Clock Tower's Oracle, Lorelei Cornet."



Lorelei lowered her body a bit while holding her skirt. As expected from a Clock Tower that was so prideful about traditions, it was a formal greeting similar to the ones from members of the royal family.

Because of their overwhelming height difference, Lorelei looked up at YuSung's face.

"Nice to meet you, Lorelei."

As YuSung greeted her with a smile, Lorelei blankly looked at his face.

"Ah... Yes!" The Clock Tower's Oracle, Lorelei, quickly replied to YuSung.

There was a reddish coloration to her cheeks that hadn't been there before.

Chapter 142

No one had been able to find it, but people believed there was something called the Akashic Records that held all of the information about the universe. It was knowledge humanity hadn't achieved.

As far as humanity knew, the closest thing to the Akashic Records was the 'Tower's Records'.

There was a lot of information about artifacts and knowledge about hunters that people hadn't known before in that book.

'The collective knowledge of the Clock Tower has surpassed the record of the Tower.'

The Principal, Veloce, smiled as she looked at the empty place on the shelf where the 'Book of Trials' should have been.

The book had a new owner.

'I thought Aris was the last person who'd be able to pass the Trial... '

Veloce's heart started to beat faster when she remembered that historic moment. The sight of Aris clearing the Trial and holding onto the book had turned England upside down.

After that, Veloce retired and decided to become the headmaster of the Clock Tower Academy.

She had believed that a hunter capable of replacing Aris, who had become a legend, would never again appear in England.

Then the Witch had brought a disciple.

The Witch of Time, the proud Clock Tower's Oracle...

Lorelei Cornet.

'I still can't believe it... '

Lorelei challenged the Trial at just 17 years of age. She'd held onto that book with her small hands, and the moment she passed the last page, she managed to conquer all of the knowledge inside it.

'She was two years older than when Aris did it.'

A new witch that would receive the blessing of all people from England had been born, and the knowledge of the Clock Tower was passed on.

The witch that the Witch had raised had succeeded the new generation.

That's why everyone inside the Clock Tower that craved knowledge couldn't help but admire Lorelei. The students and even all of the teachers considered Lorelei to be the Clock Tower's hope.

'If there's a problem... '

Veloce originally thought that the hardest opponent was Adela, but she'd changed her opinion.

As if mocking her thoughts, YuSung won the selection.

'Shin YuSung.'

If England had the Witch, Korea had the Fist King.

'He won't be an easy match for Lorelei... I wonder how she's going to prepare... '

Veloce was called a genius; she had even managed to become a rank 6 hunter, but not even she could guess Lorelei's thoughts. After all, Lorelei was a genius that would surpass the Witch.

'Fufu, I can't wait.'

The only thing Veloce could do as the headmaster was believe in Lorelei.

* * * *

Within the Oracle's personal study room...

"Then, Lorelei... Angela and I will be waiting in the club room. If you need anything, please tell us."

Sebastian guided Lorelei while greeting her formally. Lorelei walked to where she felt most comfortable and silently sat in the corner of the study room.

Tap, tap. Paf.

The study room had a small mattress and a warm blanket; there was also a soft pillow.

It was Lorelei's hideout—a place only the Oracle had the right to enter. Lorelei got in the blanket and put her back against the pillow.

Tap.

Then, she grabbed a book that was next to the mattress.

Slide.

Her small and pale hands passed over the pages of a cute book.

One page...

Two pages...

Before she noticed, she'd read more than half of the book. Lorelei had read a lot of books to be able to pass the Trial.

She remembered everything in the book.

Remembering everything was important to absorb the necessary knowledge, but that wasn't the kind of genre she really liked.

Fairy Tale (Marchen)

Among the stories, she liked a beautiful romance story about a princess and a knight.

Concentrated, Lorelei passed through the pages.

[Then the knight said...]

The knight knelt and...

[I will protect you forever.]

He made an eternal vow to the princess.

The romance between the two stimulated Lorelei's imagination.

Lorelei's imagination had been trained by the vast amount of books she'd read. She believed that if she had a book, she'd be able to see and create a vaster world than reality in her mind.

That day, she realized her thoughts were wrong.

Imagination couldn't beat reality.

The man Lorelei had met was more handsome than any knight or prince she'd imagined.

He had a thin facial profile, eyes as deep as a look, and long hair that moved beautifully in the wind.

'Wh-what am I imagining...?'

Lorelei closed her eyes and shook her head after thinking of YuSung, but even if she closed her eyes, she couldn't forget him.

No, thanks to Lorelei's impressive imagination, she could see an even clearer image of him.

[Ms. Lorelei...]

Shin YuSung was kneeling like a knight from the middle ages.

[I'll protect you forever.]

He would then kiss her hand and smile at her.

[I... don't like formality.]

The imaginary Lorelei slowly pulled her hand back, and YuSung got up.

Then he'd look down at her intensely and murmur in a low-pitched voice,

[Lorelei, I'll protect you forever...]

In Lorelei's imagination, the knight and the princess would exchange their vows while hugging each other.

Lorelei got drunk in the atmosphere before suddenly waking from her daydreams.

"Haa..."

Fwoosh-

She buried her head in the pillow, but her imagination didn't stop.

The YuSung in her imagination became a noble of a family that didn't get along with hers; then she became a princess kidnapped by a demon king, and he became a hero that went to save her. He also

became a young boy who went on a journey to find a miraculous plant that could save a girl with an illness that couldn't be cured.

"I... I..."

In the world of her imagination, the story always ended in love. Lorelei's ears turned red.

"What am I imagining...?"

Tap.

Lorelei closed the book.

'That man... is someone Ms. Aris asked me to... '

Her actions made it look like she was craving a forbidden relationship like Romeo and Juliet.

'I must beat him, no matter how... '

YuSung was an opponent she had to break.

Since Aris had asked it of her, harboring such emotions was like a crime for Lorelei.

'This isn't the moment... '

Lorelei tried her best to suppress her emotions.

* * *

EunAh was wearing gym clothes and kicking a sandbag.

Tap! Paf! Paf! Paf!

Every time her legs kicked the sandbag, a clean sound spread through the place. It was a huge development considering EunAh didn't even

know how to punch properly.

She cleaned the sweat on her neck and then said to YuSung, who was watching her from a distance, "YuSung! I'm going to use that!"

It was the reason YuSung had taught her martial arts.

"Okay. Show me, EunAh."

As YuSung acknowledged her, sparks began flying around her.

BZZT!

A blue lightning ran through EunAh's body.

The lightning raised her speed, and because of the mana, her body was fortified.

Paf!

She stomped on the ground and moved.

Paf!

Although it was an incredible speed, YuSung could see all of EunAh's movements.

She raised her leg and used the increased speed to kick the specially-made sandbag.

YuSung had taught her how to kick, so her posture was similar to his. Maybe it was because EunAh did pilates in her daily life, but she was even making movements that required a lot of smooth, water-like elasticity.



Pang! BZZT-

Sand began pouring out from the sandbag. EunAh seemed surprised

by the destructive power of her kick.

"Huh..."

When did her martial arts skill improve that much? She proudly nodded.

'Well... I guess it's normal to get strong after struggling so much... '

Although YuSung's training had been hard, she'd definitely become stronger.

"EunAh, your posture has improved a lot."

As YuSung walked toward her while praising her, EunAh did her best to not smile.

"Hmm, well... I think that it isn't bad, but it still can improve. I'm finally starting to understand, so I guess I'll improve more from now on."

EunAh spoke in a way that made it hard to differentiate whether she was being humble or arrogant. Shin YuSung just smiled at her.

'Although I finished this at seven years of age... '

That was the shocking truth EunAh didn't know.

YuSung's body and martial arts skills couldn't be compared to any active hunter's. Without knowing that, EunAh cleaned her nose with her index finger while making a proud expression.

"I feel like I've mastered kicks, so I now have to improve my punches. I feel like there's no weight in my punches?"

To YuSung, Kim EunAh's kicks were cute, but he just praised her.

"Yes. I feel like this much should be enough regarding kicks."

YuSung approached EunAh to teach her.

"The reason why... there's no weight in your punches is probably because of your weight distribution."

By twisting her waist, she could deal damage by kicking, but EunAh couldn't yet punch deeply and hit the opponent properly.

"EunAh, a bit farther than what you thought..."

Although he'd punch lightly, YuSung's fist was quite fast.

Pang!

The chilling sound made the ears feel cold.

"Woah... Interesting."

Kim EunAh tried to copy YuSung.

"Like this?"

"Your arms should be a bit like..."

Once again, to correct EunAh's posture, YuSung softly touched her arms and hands and corrected her. As YuSung's hands touched her, she coughed.

"Ehem! Sh-should we take a short break?"

"Okay. Managing your body's condition is also important."

YuSung was making his usual, pure smile. EunAh looked at him from a distance while narrowing her eyes.

"This guy... it feels like he's gotten used to touching... '

Such doubts disappeared after she looked at YuSung's pure face.

'Was it my imagination?'

Chapter 143

YuSung was walking through an elegant building with Sebastian. He could feel the eyes of the Clock Tower Academy's students.

A male student narrowed his eyes while looking at YuSung's face. Another female student turned her head away.

Although they hadn't said anything, he could feel the animosity in their eyes. The Clock Tower students weren't welcoming toward YuSung.

"How... troublesome."

Sebastian made a troubled smile and then bitterly spoke to YuSung. "To think that we'd treat guests in such a way... I'm sorry."

At Sebastian's words, YuSung looked around. Although each student was making a different expression, there wasn't a single friendly one among them.

"They don't like us."

YuSung didn't care.

Sebastian, though, who was in charge of guiding him, did care.

"But still... I hope you understand. The students of the Academy are wary of your party because they're afraid of you."

"Afraid...?" YuSung asked in confusion.

Sebastian nodded. "Yes, afraid. YuSung, you came for a match against Lorelei. Not only that... but you're the first person who managed to defeat Adela."

There was a bit of admiration in Sebastian's eyes. Even among British students, Adela's undefeated streak was legendary.

"It's obvious that everyone would be nervous. Lorelai... is special to us English people."

Sebastian's atmosphere changed as he mentioned Lorelei's name.

Continuing to speak in a serious voice, Sebastian pointed toward a giant frame above the center of the stairs.

There were portraits of Clock Tower's first Headmaster, Grephon, UK's strongest, the Witch Aris, and the third person was Lorelei.

Although there wasn't a picture of Veloce, the current headmaster, there was one of Lorelei.

"I'm embarrassed to say it, but most of the Tower's records left by the UK were left by Aris—the first person who managed to complete the Clock Tower's Trial..."

Sebastian smiled at YuSung. "Because Lorelei is the second person who managed to do it... It's hard to explain the British people's expectations of her."

After listening to Sebastian's explanation, YuSung looked around.

The Clock Tower Academy students were all giving him odd looks.

He was finally noticing the fear in them.

"They're afraid I'm going to break those expectations," YuSung said while looking at the stairs.

At YuSung's direct words, Sebastian nodded. "That's right. After all, your achievements are so impressive that even we've heard of them."

If the British people's expectations of Lorelei were that high, then Sebastian, who was a member of the same party, probably had even

higher hopes for her.

"But you don't hate me like them."

Unlike other people, Sebastian was kind. YuSung couldn't feel any emotion related to fear coming from him. It seemed like he was convinced that he could win.

YuSung realized Sebastian was similar to him.

That was also the case for Sebastian.

"That's..."

Sebastian tried to hold down his joy. He smiled at YuSung while making a calm expression.

"Because of Lorelei... No matter who the opponent is, I'm sure she's going to win. That's why I don't think that there's a need to be afraid or to act in such an ungentlemanly way."

Sebastian recognized that YuSung was a strong opponent, but he still believed that Lorelei was going to win.

Lorelei had cleared the 'Clock Tower's Trial' in her 1st year and became an Oracle; she'd even cleared a rank 6 dungeon, so she was comparable to YuSung.

'To think she'd received such trust from so many people... '

YuSung clenched his fists and smiled; then he looked at the picture of Lorelei.

'As expected of the disciple of the Witch.'

Although his head was thinking of all the ways he needed to be cautious, there was no fear in YuSung.

He was feeling happy that he'd found a strong opponent he could use

as a stepping stone.

"I can't wait."

As a relaxed smile appeared on YuSung's face, Sebastian also smiled.

"As expected of you, YuSung... You're the first person to react like this when faced with a match against Lorelei." After saying that, Sebastian guided YuSung to the dormitories.

Even while walking through the hallway of the Academy, YuSung fell into thought regarding Lorelei.

'The Clock Tower's Trial is probably similar to the Room of Time's quest that I cleared.'

Sumire, who was good regarding theory, Gaon's teacher, So HaeJung, and even Sebastian, who looked like Lorelei's servant, mentioned the 'Clock Tower's Trial' to YuSung.

According to them, the Clock Tower's Trial was an important quest with a long history that had only been cleared by two people before.

But there was something YuSung hadn't told anyone yet.

'I already... '

* * *

The Tower's hidden stage...

'Cleared the Room of Time.'

The Clock Tower's Trial was something that any student of the Clock Tower Academy could challenge, but the one he'd cleared was one you could only challenge if you fulfilled certain conditions in the Tower.

'I've cleared one that's above that.'

YuSung cleared one of the Tower's Hidden Stages for the first time at the young age of 17, which was a historical record.

Not only that, but as a reward for it, his Trait had been fortified.

Now, his Trait wasn't [Heightened Focus], but [Super Sense Awakening].

He'd used the Pocket to check the ranking, but it hadn't been classified.

'Super Sense Awakening is a humanity-first Trait I obtained thanks to my training and having cleared the Room of Time.'

It wasn't something that showed on the outside, so YuSung's Trait couldn't be analyzed by others—it didn't have a weak point or a way it could be destroyed.

'This isn't a match between Lorelei and me... '

He wasn't arrogant.

Although YuSung was strong, he always gave it all. He'd reached his conclusion after thinking about it for a while.

If what he'd heard until then about Lorelei's [Time's Manager] Trait was true, what YuSung needed wasn't to analyze his opponent but to use his [Super Sense Awakening].

'There are three days left... That's enough time.'

YuSung was planning to sharpen his claws during his stay in London.

* * * *

Kim EunAh and Amy were both famous in the Clock Tower Academy but for different reasons.

EunAh was the heir of Korea's biggest conglomerate, and Amy was a

very active streamer.

Although they were in England, it would be weird if they hadn't heard about them.

A few female students were looking at them cautiously, and others intentionally ignored them, but it was obvious that they'd get the attention of a few male students.

"So it's them."

"But the person behind them..."

Still, the male students were just looking at them from a distance. They couldn't get close to EunAh and Amy.

'If you try to do something, you'll die.'

It was because of Angela, who was guiding them. Thanks to her, even the male students who would've tried talking to them couldn't get close to them.

Angela was harsh with men.

"Miss EunAh? I will send you the castle's map through the pocket later. Are you uncomfortable with anything~? If there's anything, I'll solve it for you!"

Angela, who was the fear of all students, was too kind to EunAh. The only other person she treated so well was Lorelei.

It wasn't that she treated all guests kindly...

"Me? Well... everything seems okay."

"Really? That's good to hear! Ah, I was worried that you might find the Clock Tower's installations uncomfortable."

"Rather than that, where's the shower?"

"To get to the female students' shower room, you must walk a bit more. It's opposite the male students' showers, so there's a bit of a distance."

"Is that so?" Kim EunAh reacted insensitively, and Angela was kind.

As EunAh nodded, Amy took a glimpse at Angela. "Ehm... I think... we can go by ourselves."

Amy, who was usually kind to everyone, seemed uncomfortable with Angela, but Angela still smiled at her kindly.

"I cannot let important guests go alone. The headmaster personally asked me to attend to you, so please, be understanding..."

"She's saying that she's going to take us. Why are you reacting like that?"

As EunAh looked at her as if she were being petty, Angela shook her head. "Since I am a member of an opposing party, I understand you're burdened, Amy."

"Th-that's not it. EunAh..."

Amy was about to say something when she dropped the last part of the sentence. Regardless of her, Angela approached EunAh and looked at her from up close.

"EunAh, your skin is quite good. It's so white and doesn't seem to have any imperfections."

"Huh? Is... is that so?"

Kim EunAh didn't like sunlight, so bodyguards often followed her with a parasol. On top of that, she frequently received beauty treatments at her mother's insistence.

"Well, I do receive treatment, but..."

As Kim EunAh made a troubled expression at the sudden praise, Angela kept praising her.

"Your body profile is also great. A few moments ago... I couldn't take my eyes off how you trained!"

"Well. That's a bit... right?"

Kim EunAh was starting to let her guard down at Angela's praise. She was walking right next to her.

"But... I was worried about your muscles because of your harsh training. I was worried you'd develop muscle knots."

Slide.

Angela naturally placed her hands on Kim EunAh's shoulders and pressed on them.

"Don't you want one of my massages? Although the most I can do is to press on your shoulders, I'm sure it will feel good..."

Honey was dripping down from Angela's eyes as she looked EunAh. Although EunAh was surprised at the sudden touch, she wasn't on guard because Angela was a girl. The one who became surprised was Amy.

'EunAh... is in danger!'

[Image]

Amy seemed to know something about Angela.

"Ah! I can see the shower! Now we can go! Right, EunAh?"

As Amy changed the topic while pointing to the shower room, Angela began smiling creepily. "Then... Shall we go in? I was also planning to shower."

"What?! No! Definitely no!"

Amy refused the idea of Angela taking a shower with them.

"Hey, why are you acting like this today? What's wrong with taking a shower together? Is it because she's from the other team?"

As EunAh clicked her tongue, Amy began feeling annoyed.

"EunAh, you dummy! It isn't something like that! Angela's..."

Amy was about to say something when she nervously looked at Angela. Angela was just smiling at her. Amy turned her eyes away and said, "He, hehe... You see... Ah! That's right! If Angela is here, we cannot talk about the tournament. There is stuff we must discuss as soon as possible!"

Amy quickly thought of an excuse.

Kim EunAh nodded while mumbling, "Oh yeah. That's right."

"There's nothing to be done."

Angela clicked her tongue in disappointment, but that only lasted for a short while. She soon regained her formality and spoke to the two of them with respect.

"Then, EunAh, Amy? I hope to see you again."

Amy had managed to save Kim EunAh from the claws of a beast called Angela.

Chapter 144

[Here's the lodging... Feel free to tell us if you find anything uncomfortable.]

Thanks to what Sebastian said, YuSung had no expectations regarding the lodging, but it was bigger than he expected.

'It doesn't lack even compared to Gaon... '

They'd used a lot of money to build the modern installations.

The Clock Tower Academy's 'Seven' dormitories were full of simple but luxurious furniture and installations.

'And this familiar yet unfamiliar scent... Is it Sumire's new menu?'

He smelled meat that had been boiled until it became soft and well-seasoned vegetables.

The scent of Sumire's meat stew increased YuSung's expectations.

'I haven't tasted it yet... but I already know it's delicious.'

Considering the other party members had yet to arrive, an hour was probably left before dinner.

'Taking a bath with the smell of meat stew filling my nose sounds good.'

YuSung organized the schedule from the entrance, and Sumire greeted him with a smile from the kitchen. She was wearing an apron.

"Ah. YuSung! You're here earlier than I expected!"

"Yes. EunAh and Amy are also going to arrive soon."

After she'd finished training, EunAh chose the Academy's shower room instead of the one in the lodging.

It seemed like she was shy about taking a shower in a shared lodging. Sumire nodded as if she understood her.

"Ah... Then... Yusung... Do you want to take a shower or eat first...?" Sumire asked in a shy tone.

YuSung calmly answered, "I'm going to take a shower before EunAh and Amy arrive."

He untied the ribbon on his head, and his hair flowed down. Sumire stared at him before quickly pointing toward the shower room.

"I... I knew you'd choose that! So... I already warmed the bath water!"

"Sumire, as always, thank you."

Sumire smiled awkwardly at YuSung's thanks; then she looked back at the stew.

She made an expression that made it seem like she'd been thinking deeply about something and said, "Since... I can't go out in this match, I at least wanted to ensure my party members are in good condition."

After saying that, Sumire smiled at YuSung. As always, YuSung was honest regarding his thoughts and emotions.

"Sumire, you're always thinking about us."

YuSung slowly walked toward her while talking in a soft voice. Sumire nervously watched him approach.

"YuSung..."

"As expected. Our party wouldn't be complete without you."

Sumire had made EunAh open herself to others. Lee SiWoo, who didn't have a positive opinion of her, ended up recognizing her, and she'd never betrayed YuSung's trust and expectations. She always went beyond her capabilities and achieved more than expected.

"Sumire, thank you."

Although it hadn't been long since YuSung made the party, there were too many things he was thankful to Sumire for.

When he smiled at her while saying his thanks, Sumire's cheeks turned red.

"M-me too..."

Sumire didn't dodge his eyes and looked at him directly.

"YuSung! Thank you!"

Despite being shy, she smiled at YuSung while looking him in the eyes. She'd definitely changed.

Tap.

At that moment, his hands touched Sumire's head.

'Sumire always asked for this when she was under the influence of the fragment, right?'

Laplace's fragment made Sumire more honest with herself. Basically, YuSung stroking her head was something she wanted in daily life.

"Then, keep doing a good job. Sumire."

After saying that, YuSung left to take a shower, but Sumire went stone-still and blushed.

'YuSung... '

Sumire touched her hair.

Although she couldn't participate in the tournament, thanks to YuSung's actions, Sumire was happier than at any other time.

* * *

Swoosh.



Water poured from the shower head.

In the shower room that was separated by blue glass, Amy peeped out

at EunAh.

"EunAh... This is my opinion, but I don't think you should get friendly with Angela. She seems... A bit dangerous."

"Haa. That again? I just exchanged a few words with her."

"I'm just saying that you should be careful... Angela... There's something weird about her."

Although Amy was saying it uneasily, EunAh just cast it aside.

"Okay. Just take a shower."

"But I'm telling the truth..."

"Rather than that, what's the plan you wanted to discuss?"

"Ah, that?"

Amy smiled at EunAh's question. Although she'd said that to separate Angela from EunAh, Amy saying they needed to discuss the match was true.

"I heard that Lorelei's team has received artifacts from the Association."

"What? Besides the Saint's Sphere?"

The Saint's Sphere was a unique artifact from Aris. Because of that, they'd managed to stop Sumire from participating.

"Yes. Although it probably won't be a unique-rank one... According to the information, they ordered the items after Korea was chosen as an opponent."

Kim EunAh frowned. "They ordered artifacts...? Does that mean they were created in the 'Tower's Atelier'?"

The Tower's Atelier...

It was an Atelier that took elite artisans from six countries and created hunter equipment. The equipment from the Tower's Atelier was something that only elite hunters could use, and the amount of money required to create each artifact was astronomical.

"You don't know what they created, do you...?"

EunAh's expression became serious while she wiped the water from her body with a towel. From the start, the English team got a unique artifact and even asked for certain items from the Tower's Atelier.

Because the country's honor was on the line, they seemed to be trying their best. Kim EunAh started to get anxious.

'I need to participate this time no matter what... '

EunAh wasn't able to participate in the match against Japan due to familial reasons, so it would be the first time she'd be participating.

Thinking that they might lose because of artifacts made her angry. That would make all of the training she'd done with YuSung meaningless.

'Regardless of what they bring, I must win, no matter how... '

EunAh had a strong sense of competitiveness.

As EunAh bit her lips, Amy, covered with a towel, carefully walked like a cat toward the changing room.

Swoosh- Sssk!

Amy glanced at EunAh, who'd just finished dressing, and asked, "EunAh... isn't it easy to guess what kind of artifact it is?"

Although Amy looked like that, she was able to think fast. Although her grades weren't as high as Sumire's, she was still one of the best

students regarding grades. EunAh continued to silently dry her hair.

'An artifact to fight us... '

Tap.

EunAh put the hair dryer down.

She was able to figure it out after a bit of thought. Amy was right.

"Based on what they've prepared, rather than focusing on their individual Traits, they're probably going to use artifacts aimed at us."

Amy nodded at EunAh's serious tone.

"Seeing how they prepared the Saint's Sphere to stop Sumire, they're for sure going to do that for each of us."

"Then the question is what artifact to block who... Since they prepared the Saint's Sphere, it probably won't be Sumire..."

Amy agreed to what Kim EunAh had guessed and added something.

"Yes! Although it angers me, it probably won't be for SiWoo or me since we haven't shown much until now~ We also aren't Sevens."

There were only two besides Sumire, Lee SiWoo, and Amy: Shin YuSung and Kim EunAh.

EunAh looked at herself in the mirror and raised electricity from her right hand.

BZZT-!

The crackling blue electricity sparked out light, and EunAh made a serious expression and spoke in a low voice, "Me...?"

"I'm not sure, but... the artifact will probably be specifically to counter you or the party leader."

There were many artifacts that could tolerate Kim EunAh's Trait of Electricity.

"If it's me, I might have to fight without electricity," EunAh said.

Amy hesitated for a bit; then she opened her mouth while scratching her cheeks.

"Yes. If they're being cautious about you, I think it will be something against electricity. Maybe they will wear an anti-electricity suit or an artifact that can absorb it..."

"I see."

Kim EunAh had finished putting on her clothes and was tying her hair.

Swipe- Tap.

'Electricity... '

If Amy's information was right, there was a chance she might have to fight against someone immune to electricity.

That was a hard opponent—just like the first time she fought against the Lake Dragon.

"It doesn't matter," EunAh calmly said.

EunAh had learned martial arts from YuSung. Thanks to that, she's learned new techniques. She wasn't her old self who relied only on electricity anymore.

"I'll win," EunAh said with confidence.

Amy's eyes widened.

"EunAh...! You're too cool! That sounds like something the party leader would say!"

As always, Amy smiled cutely at EunAh.

Chapter 145

Within China's branch of the Hunter's Association, a woman wearing a hat with a black veil was sitting in a luxurious wooden chair while biting a long pipe.

"Fuu-"

White smoke rose from her mouth.

"So... there was something you wanted to tell me?" She asked while looking at Liú Jùn, who was sitting beside her.

The woman's voice had the strength to make one nervous, the strength to make even a wild beast tremble. It was the power of someone who was strong.

"To think you'd come here at such a busy time..."

As she shook off the ashes, her white arms became visible. The lines were very beautiful, but there were marks all over her arms—they were the traces of all the battles she'd been in.

"Is it something worthy of it?" She asked relaxedly with her legs crossed. Liú Jùn frowned.

He didn't like how his master could speak with such calm despite knowing what was going on.

"Yesterday, Liú Míng entered the surgery room..."

Liú Jùn's sister, Liú Míng, had a weird mana-related disease. To keep her alive, they needed to change the mana inside her.

It was as if she only had a limited amount of time to live.

"Is it about your sister? Then this should be the fourth time."

Despite Liú Míng's tragic story, the woman bit the long pipe without any change in her expression.

"So, what is it that you want to tell me?"

Liú Jùn was also used to that kind of reaction from his master. She had taught him to pass on her sword skills and only that, after all.

She's gathered many prodigies from across China, and after a fierce selection, she'd chosen Liú Jùn.

There weren't any warm words exchanged in their relationship.

They both chose each other because each had something the other needed.

"I..." Liú Jùn stopped talking for a short while.

Then he spoke in a calm and cold tone.

"Did you forget why I became your disciple...?"

She was China's Sword God.

Among the many that wanted to be taught by her, Liú Jùn's desire differed from others.

[If I become a strong hunter... can I really make my sister better?]

He had been a reliable kid despite being only 14 years old.

She'd smirked at Liú Jùn's question and nodded.

[Yes. There are all sorts of mysteries in the Tower. Saving a dying child won't be hard, but...]

The Sword God looked up and down at Liú Jùn, who was severely wounded.

[The Tower's miracle is a fire that burns beautifully. If you get swept away by it, you'll end up becoming ash. The only ones who can get hold of that miracle are extremely few chosen hunters. Not even I know if you can obtain such strength.]

[It doesn't matter. Even if I become ash, I'll grab it. No matter how.]

She put the long pipe in her mouth, took a deep breath, and then slowly let the white smoke out.

"There's no way I'd forgotten about that. Fuu-"

The Sword God put down the long pipe and said to Liú Jùn, "I'm going to make sure she doesn't die... That isn't hard if we use circulation stones."

Circulation stones were a temporary solution. They couldn't fix Liú Míng's illness.

"Your debt is probably going to increase. Although it's me who's asking... What's keeping your sister alive is the Association's money, so we should be thankful. Isn't that right, disciple?"

The circulation stones were the only things keeping his little sister alive. Although it was a temporary solution, Liú Jùn had to hold onto it. To ensure Liú Míng's body didn't turn cold, he'd have to risk burning down to ashes.

"Thank you..."

How much was his current debt with the Association? The circulation stone was a rare mineral. The amount of it available was little compared to the number of people that wanted it. A small stone was enough to buy a couple of buildings.

It was more expensive than the average artifact; Liú Jùn had used more than 10 over the past 7 years. All for his little sister.

He was able to do that because the Association had decided to invest in him.

If it weren't because the Chinese Hunter Association President was the Sword God, it would've been impossible.

Liú Jùn turned away after giving her a salute.

At that moment, the Sword God's voice caused him to stop.

"Do you want to climb the Tower...?"

The Tower...

It was an unknown structure with all sorts of miracles. Liú Jùn had become strong to be able to get the artifact that could save Liú Míng, so that's why he obviously wanted to climb the Tower.

Liú Jùn turned around and looked at his master.

Even if he hadn't said anything, one could feel the intensity in Liú Jùn's eyes. The Sword God lifted the hat a bit. He could see her pink lips smiling behind her veil.

"Yes...? That's great."

* * *

Slide-

The Sword God gave him a piece of paper.

"It's an entrance permission slip. It has my seal, so go there and test your limits."

The Tower full of unknown things...

It was the place that Liú Jùn wanted to enter more than anyone, and he'd finally gotten permission to go.

The Sword God then stood up from her seat.

"Since I've already done so much for you, you'll have to prove yourself to the world."

The Sword God cared about the fight that would soon take place between Shin YuSung and Lorelei.

The names behind the match between students were too entertaining.

They were the disciples of Fist King Yu WonHak and the Witch Aris—her previous partners.

"Remember that the goal is to win. Nothing besides that matters, so don't even think of dirtying my name."

As the Sword God left after saying that, Liú Jùn gripped the entrance permission tighter.

The Tower's peak...

Liú Jùn was aiming to reach a territory that no one had been able to, so mere students couldn't be his goal. After all, Liú Míng's desire to go out and make new friends hadn't been made a reality yet.

That's why, to make her wish come true, he couldn't stop.

'It doesn't matter who comes.'

Shin YuSung, Adela, Lorelei...

Losing wasn't in Liú Jùn's plans.

* * * *

The Clock Tower's training room was a safe place that wouldn't break while training.

Lorelei and Angela were doing a test with a lightning gun that was

installed in the ceilings.

They were testing if Angela could dodge an electricity attack coming from the ceilings. Taking into consideration how fast electricity was, it seemed impossible, but she quickly figured out the attack patterns of the lightning gun and managed to dodge the attacks.

It was a physical ability that was hard to believe.

"As expected."

Lorelei looked at Angela, who was kneeling.

"Now that we've stopped the necromancer from appearing thanks to the Saint's Sphere, the remaining opponent is just Angela. I have high hopes for you."

Lorelei gave Angela an artifact she'd prepared—an unknown cloth.

"Lorelei..."

"With this artifact, I'm sure you'll be able to easily defeat EunAh."

"Fufu. If it's that person, leave it to me. I'm... really confident."

As EunAh's name left Lorelei's mouth, Angela's expression made it look like she was having fun. EunAh was a beauty that grabbed everyone's attention with white skin that stimulated your will to protect, a well-maintained body, and a rough personality.

Although Angela had looked at EunAh for only a short while, it seemed like she liked her.

That wasn't the only reason Angela was stuck on EunAh.

'I know the truth... Despite her strong outer appearance... '

Angela had noticed it from EunAh's eyes.

Kim EunAh wasn't strong, but she was the type of person that acted strong. Although she had strong armor on the outside, her inner self was weak.

'I want to see it... The real face she's hiding.'

Angela was planning to bother EunAh as much as possible. She'd even obtained an anti-electricity artifact, so it wouldn't be hard. If they managed to seal her Trait, she'd surely win since she relied on her physical specs.

'I'm going to block her mouth so that she can't verbally give up... and slowly... very slowly... tease her.'

Angela imagined Kim EunAh's confident face distorting while making a painful expression and then her asking her for forgiveness with tears pouring from her eyes. Angela could already feel her body getting hotter.

[Image]

'Of course... Even if you cry, I won't forgive you.'

Gulp-

Angela gulped.

'I'd prefer you to remain by my side... but I only have one chance.'

Angela wanted to create a memory EunAh wouldn't be able to forget—she wanted her to tremble in fear every time she remembered their fight.

She wanted the sensation of having left steps in a white snowfield. It didn't matter if the emotions were fear or humiliation.

Angela stood up and looked at Lorelei.

"Then... As per your orders, Lorelei, I'm going to take care of that

person."

Angela made an expectant smile while waiting for the fight against EunAh. Lorelei nodded with an indifferent expression on her face.

"I'm going to leave it to you, Angela."

"Yes, Lorelei."

Unlike her dirty inner thoughts, Angela smiled kindly at Lorelei.

Chapter 146

He was in a room surrounded by transparent glass.

[Training Room - Dodge Curriculum]

[Difficulty - Level 6]

[Code-GA-SN2 Shin YuSung]

[User verification complete.]

YuSung checked the hologram.

Whir-

The sound of wind over the whirring of machines spread to the surroundings.

Tang!

At the same time, a mana bullet shot toward him. YuSung controlled the mana in his body.

I can even feel the texture of the wind... Is it because of Super Sense?'

The mana bullet moved at 400 meters per second. The speed was close to how fast an actual bullet would move.

A normal student wouldn't be able to dodge it from such a short distance, but even that speed was too slow for YuSung.

'I can do it.'

He guessed the speed and direction of the mana bullet, which was

simple enough if you knew the bullet's properties and where it would hit.

Then he needed to twist the result. Shin YuSung matched his mana frequency to the bullet's and caused a mana resonance.

Battle God Style 5th Form - Wave Resonance

Blue light beautifully scattered away from YuSung's hands.

Whir! Pang!

The first mana bullet headed toward him vanished without a trace.

'I succeeded.'

It was the most basic type of mana resonance. It was so rare that a normal hunter might never see it in their lifetime, but he'd purposefully triggered it. Still, he wasn't satisfied with that.

Slide!

YuSung extended his hands toward the second mana bullet's origin. That time, it didn't end with the same amount of mana being shot.

Fwoosh!

With a simple hand gesture, the wind blew. It rose like a shockwave, and the direction of the shockwave changed in the direction YuSung wanted.

Pang!

The mana bullet shot toward YuSung was cut in half and scattered horizontally away. He could neutralize the opponent's skill just by controlling mana and also alter the trajectory of an attack.

He was the first hunter capable of using mana resonance as he wanted.

Shin YuSung fell into thought while looking at his hands.

'It's still hard to maintain the form I want.'

He wanted to maintain the shape of the mana that he'd changed the trajectory of.

If he could do that, he would not only be able to eliminate the opponent's attack but also use their attack.

'I guess it will be possible once I get used to the Super Sense a bit more.'

He had finished the morning warm-up, so it was time to meet with his party members.

'Then, should I get going?'

Shin YuSung left the training room, a smile on his face.

* * *

Within a room in Clock Tower Academy, The Gaon party members were waiting for YuSung.

"Should I get some snacks and tea...?"

Since Sumire couldn't participate, she smiled awkwardly and looked cautiously at the others.

"No."

EunAh shook her head, and then she looked at both Sumire and Amy.

"I wonder who the last member of this round will be..." Kim EunAh looked at the other party members while touching her chin.

Sumire and Amy looked at each other. Since Sumire couldn't participate because of the Saint's Sphere, there weren't many

candidates left.

Amy carefully lifted her hand. "P-probably me? Sumire... can't participate because of the Saint's Sphere after all..."

"You... have you used your Trait recently?" Kim EunAh was direct with her; Amy shook her head.

"I... I haven't... No! I couldn't! I'm really busy! I've been working for almost 16 hours a day!"

As Amy complained, Kim EunAh frowned.

"Are you proud of not practicing? You're too lazy..."

Amy's face teared up as EunAh clicked her tongue with her arms crossed.

"E-EunAh, you've changed! Since when are you so intense? Wh-who... Are you?" Amy asked, tearing up while being held by Sumire. Amy seemed shocked at the change in EunAh's character, but EunAh's mind had been re-wired.

"Isn't it normal for Hunters to practice 12 hours daily?"

As Kim EunAh told her the training standards from YuSung's point of view, Amy shook her head while making a shocked expression. "You... What happened to you? Who made you like this?! I've never heard of such a fierce training schedule! You'll die!"

"You won't."

"You'll definitely die!"

"But I did it."

"C-crazy. As expected, you aren't the EunAh I know... Say it. Who are you...?"

While Kim EunAh and Amy were going at each other, Sumire interfered. "But still! Maybe... There's a chance Amy might be able to win, right? You never know until the end..."

Amy made a bitter smile. "Really? I wonder if there's someone in that party I can beat... They're all Sevens... I, in reality, thought of myself as the party's mascot... Like someone in charge of promotions..."

Thanks to Amy's low confidence, the atmosphere worsened. Although Amy was strong in the A class, there was still a distance between her and the Sevens.

Clack.

The room's door opened.

Sumire's expression brightened when she saw YuSung.

"YuSung!" Sumire's eyes widened, and she seemed excited.

"I made everyone wait." YuSung smiled while looking at his party members, and Amy laughed.

"Party leader! I'm prepared! Since it's like this, I'll do my best like my life depends on it!" Amy shouted confidently.

"Just don't get hurt." Kim EunAh said in a worried voice.

"I'm sure Amy will be able to do it! We're going to win this round, too!"

Clap, clap, clap-

Sumire clapped while making a kind smile, but Shin YuSung smiled awkwardly.

"Amy, I'm sorry."

"What?"

"There's someone else who's going to participate."

YuSung's shocking revelation caused Amy's eyes to widen in surprise, and someone entered from the opened door.

He had a small height and a familiar face.

Unlike before, his atmosphere had completely changed. He was more relaxed than before.

"Hi. Long time no see."



The club room was turned upside down at the unexpected appearance.

"What's going on?!"

"So it was Lee SiWoo..."

"Woah... It isn't me."

Kim EunAh's eyes widened in surprise.

Sumire said, "Aha".

Amy made a relieved expression.

Lee SiWoo smiled awkwardly at the widely different reactions.

"Yes. I'm going to participate in this round."

EunAh seemed suspicious about Lee SiWoo's skills. "YuSung, can he really beat England's team?"

"Yes, EunAh. I guarantee it. I believe in SiWoo's skill."

Because the party leader guaranteed it, EunAh wouldn't ask any further. Still, she couldn't help but be suspicious. It seemed like SiWoo was expecting EunAh's reaction.

"I understand why you're thinking that, but don't worry. Leave it to me... I won't hesitate anymore."

Even at EunAh's suspicious eyes, SiWoo replied while making a relaxed expression. She wasn't sure about his skills, but his atmosphere had definitely changed.

SiWoo looked up at YuSung and smiled. "I'm sorry, YuSung. I was baggage until now."

SiWoo was thankful to YuSung for giving him a chance to change. YuSung was the only one who believed in his potential and had waited for him.

Even SiWoo's father didn't believe in his potential as a hunter and had proposed he should become a city guard, but YuSung had waited for

him even though the match round was about to start.

He was a party leader he could trust and follow regardless of the situation. SiWoo looked at YuSung with eyes full of trust.

"And thank you... If not for you. Who would've believed in me?"

EunAh wasn't swept away by the atmosphere. She sat on the sofa while making an uninterested expression. "So you became that strong? Well, I... believe in YuSung, so..."

Seeing how EunAh agreed, it seemed her personality had softened. Amy made a relaxed smile at having narrowly dodged danger.

"Okay. Then since everyone is here. How about we have dinner?"

"Ah! Dinner's great! Good! I want to try that. Sumire~ The party leader said your fried chicken curry is great~" It seemed like Amy had fully recovered. She reacted very well to Sumire's proposal to eat.

"Y-YuSung praised..." Sumire looked at Shin YuSung with shining eyes.

"That's right. Your curry. No, your cooking is always delicious, Sumire."

As YuSung praised her with sincerity, Sumire rolled her arms up and shouted, "Okay! You all need strength for tomorrow's match, so today, I'll make fried chicken curry!"

'Curry... '

YuSung nodded while making an expectant smile.

SiWoo grinned and spoke to YuSung. "Then, YuSung, do you want to try this after dinner? It's a cookie Sakura made."

SiWoo's words grabbed Sumire and Amy's attention.

"S-Sakura?"

"Hng~ Cookies she personally made? I'm good at guessing~ EunAh, isn't this~"

Sumire and Amy were surprised, but Kim EunAh didn't seem interested in SiWoo's dating life. She just yawned.

"Well, that's possible."

On the other hand, YuSung was more interested in the word 'cookie' than 'Sakura'.

'A hand-made cookie...? It would be great to have something to drink to accompany it.'

As expected, YuSung was still unaware of such things.

Chapter 147

The Clock Tower was different from usual.

There were drones in the sky and a recording team. Many cameras and microphones were installed all around the place as well.

"Then, shall I go...?"

As Headmaster Veloce walked toward the middle, white light poured out.

She was a former rank 6 hunter, the headmaster of Clock Tower Academy, and in charge of presenting.

- With Veloce's entrance, we will present the English representatives.

As Veloce walked along the stage with the deep voice of the anchor, Bendom, reverberating through the area, claps and shots so loud that it seemed the Academy would blow up followed.

It seemed like all of London's citizens had gathered in Clock Tower Academy.

Although all sorts of languages were heard, the most common was Korean, which was used as a common language among hunters.

'To think that she'd have so much popularity... As expected of Lorelei, should I say?'

As Veloce waved toward the people, the camera recorded her. Clock Tower Academy was being broadcast to the whole world.

YuSung and Lorelei...

The news that the Fist King's disciple would face the Witch's disciple had shaken up the world.

Veloce smiled at the reaction that was more heated than she expected.

'I like this. With such a scale... It would be great if she were to win.'

The Witch's Disciple, the Clock Tower's Oracle, the 2nd person to clear the Trial...

There were many achievements and nicknames around Lorelei, but Veloce thought that they were not enough to describe her. As Veloce sat in the commentator's seat, Bendom made a gentlemanly gesture.

The red carpet, which they had to get the permission of the Royal Family to use, was rolled out, and Bendom shouted loudly.

- The center of the news that has shocked London and, of course, all of the UK. The one who recently managed to clear the rank 6 dungeon, Ms. Lorelei!

Lorelei walked over the red carpet while receiving everyone's welcome. She entered the Clock Tower Academy as if she were a princess of the middle ages.

Sebastian and her party came walking behind her.

Unlike the English team's luxurious entrance, there wasn't a red carpet when YuSung and the Korean team entered.

Not only that, but people also didn't clap that much.

"As expected of the home ground."

SiWoo whistled at the atmosphere, and YuSung looked at the opponent, Lorelei, and then said to his party members, "Don't get nervous. Let's show them what we've prepared."

SiWoo nodded and smiled, and Kim EunAh stretched.

Bendom pointed toward a screen installed outside.

- The 2nd round of the International Competition will be held in London! As everyone knows, from the 2nd round, the matches will no longer be one-on-one, and they will be set in one of the original roulette maps!

Hunters needed something more than strength, and that's why the maps in the 2nd round weren't that simple.

Teamwork, how to deal with dangerous situations, engaging in a large-scale battle... Depending on the map, the results could greatly vary.

Slash!!

The roulette began spinning. The speed slowly started to decrease until, with a *Ting!*, it stopped; the name of the map appeared on the screen.

[Map - Hunter vs. Villain]

[Hunter Team - Gaon Academy]

[Villain Team - Clock Tower Academy]

- The map has been decided! The ruleset of this 2nd round is Hunter vs. Villain! It will be an interesting match. We will be able to see not only battles but also each team's strategy.

Hunter vs. Villain was one of the tests often done in the Academy from the 1st year to the 3rd.

Hunters had to analyze the villains' positions and then strategize to defeat the villains, but they used actors in the Academy tests. They used a virtual portal to recreate the situation properly in the International Competition.

[Match Content]

[Location - Clock Tower Academy]

[Hunter - Stop the generator (5 points), break the barrier (5 points), walk out of Clock Tower with the students (5 points).]

[Villain - Kidnap the students (5 points), take the hidden targets (5 points), activate the escape portal (5 points).]

[When you eliminate an opponent party member, you'll gain 5 points. If you eliminate the party leader, you'll get 10 points.]

The hunter and villain teams had different goals and rules.

The strategy was more important in the match than at any other time.

- It's a map where strategy is important.

- Lorelei is the 2nd person to clear the Clock Tower's Trial, so we can expect an impressive strategy from her.

Lorelei monopolized the attention of everyone there.

Even in a situation where she should have been smiling, Veloce was doing her best to maintain her elegance as the headmaster.

- Fufu... Korea and England. Regardless of the result, I hope we get a good match. Then, while the portal is activating, both teams, please read the instructions.

[Rules and Instructions]

[The participants will each receive 3 different quests.]

1. The virtual portal is set in the Clock Tower.

2. If damage stacks up and you end up getting eliminated, you'll be pushed out of the portal.

3. The portal is connected to a virtual place that has been created with

mana.

4. Only 3 artifacts and pieces of hunter equipment are allowed in the Pockets.

5. You can send Pocket messages up to 5 times.

The most important instructions were that each had a different quest, and you could send messages from the Pocket.

'The party leader can give orders regarding strategy five times. The most important thing is how you use it.' While Shin YuSung was thinking about the plan, Lorelei was staring at him.

"She's looking at YuSung a lot. It seems like her desire to win is quite impressive." Lee SiWoo said in a disapproving voice.

Meanwhile, EunAh was sweating when she saw how Angela was looking at her.

'Is that a desire to win...?'

There was something weird about how Angela was looking at her. Lorelei's head was also lost in another place.

'Shin YuSung... ' She called out his name in her head.

Lorelei couldn't keep her eyes from YuSung's face.

A tall nose, alabaster skin, a sharp face line... How could someone be so handsome?



Not even the Knights from Lorelei's imagination were so good-looking.

"Shin... YuSung..." Lorelei subconsciously called out Shin YuSung's

name. She didn't know the meaning of the name, but for some reason, even the pronunciation of his name felt beautiful.

To think that he was so beautiful and strong. YuSung was the closest person to Lorelei's ideals.

Sebastian suddenly called her. "Lorelei, the portal opened."

Lorelei, who'd been blankly staring at YuSung, returned to her senses; Then she spoke calmly, as if nothing had happened, "I fell into deep thoughts for a moment..."

She left her disappointment behind as she looked at YuSung's back. The two parties that were about to clash walked into the portal.

* * *

Within the Shinsung Group's office, a place one could only enter with special permission...

Although there weren't any meetings that day, the TV on the wall was still turned on.

[Korea's team is currently entering the portal.]

[The two students in front, Shin YuSung and Kim EunAh, are Sevens, so we can expect a fierce battle!]

Veloce and Bendom's voices spread through the meeting room; the people there silently watched the screens.

As Kim EunAh's face was zoomed in on, the meeting room became immediately noisy.

"Baby! Finally, our EunAh appeared on screen!"

President Kim SeokHan seemed happy to see his granddaughter's face after a while. Kim YunHa laughed while covering her mouth. "Fufu! Father! Our EunAh has a very serious expression! I've never seen her

so focused on something."

"It's dangerous, so I still don't like it... but I have no choice but to cheer for her."

Kim SungHan touched his glasses while looking at the happy sight of his daughter. Due to their busy schedules, the family hadn't been able to spend much time with Kim EunAh. There were even years when she spent more time with the secretary than her family.

Whenever he saw EunAh, who suffered from loneliness but didn't let it be seen, he felt sorry.

The match was the stage to let those uneasy feelings go and trust EunAh. He could only watch EunAh doing her best to become a hunter.

YunHa seemed to understand SungHan's complex feelings. "Darling. Let's stop worrying so much."

As the two looked at each other intensely, Kim JunHyuk changed the atmosphere.

"That's right. I heard it from mother, but that YuSung student... From what I've heard, he seems to be trustworthy. He's ambitious despite being young! More than anything, EunAh always wanted a good-looking..." Kim JunHyuk stopped talking at Kim SungHan's intense killing intent.

"They're just a party! Yet you've gone too far! If someone heard you, they'd think that our EunAh's attracted to that guy!" Kim SungHan's eyes were burning intensely.

Kim JunHyuk scratched his head. "Ah, ah, haha..."

JunHyuk remembered what EunAh had said, so he was sure of it.

[I... don't want things like that. I'll marry a rich husband and then live spending money.]

'I'm sure there isn't anyone better looking than him around EunAh... '

Although the judgment of appearance changed from person to person, JunHyuk thought that, even if they searched worldwide, they wouldn't be able to find someone better looking than YuSung.

On top of that, YuSung had saved both of them. To make things worse, she only talked about him whenever he was with EunAh.

'Her expression has improved too... '

EunAh was changing because of YuSung. Her heart had never allowed someone to enter, but YuSung had changed that.

'Grandfather, EunAh's already... '

He just laughed while looking at the broadcast. Kim JunHyuk didn't express his thoughts.

He hoped that SeokHan wouldn't realize their relationship soon.

'It would be great if it came to light after EunAh graduates... '

It seemed like Kim SeokHan didn't know JunHyuk's thoughts. He was just talking in a loud voice while looking at the screen.

"Hoho! Since she's participating, I hope EunAh defeats them all and makes a huge contribution!"

* * * *

As EunAh crossed the portal, she saw an intense white light. She slowly opened her eyes, and a scene unfolded before her.

"We're all ruined..."

"Why haven't the hunters arrived yet? We're also citizens! We're still students..."

The students were trembling in fear and blocking the door with a barricade made of tables and chairs.

"What's this...?"

As Kim EunAh looked around while making a confused expression...

Paf!

A hologram appeared in front of her eyes.

[Selected Map - Hunter vs. Villain]

[Starting Place - Clock Tower Academy's 2nd Floor]

[Role - Student Council President]

[Mission 1 - You need to control the students in place of the teachers while waiting for the hunters to arrive.]

[If you fail, you'll pay 5 points to the opposing team.]

Although EunAh appeared confident, she couldn't help but laugh in disbelief at the role given to her.

"This is the end for us..."

"Are hunters really going to arrive?"

"Shut up! What will you do if they hear us?"

On top of that, the students began fighting with each other. Kim EunAh placed her hands on her forehead.

"They're all imbeciles..." She said in a low voice so only she would hear it.

EunAh's debut started with a risky situation.

Chapter 148

The Akashic Records was a collection of knowledge that had all of the records of the world. A portion of humanity believed that the Akashic Records weren't real, but others believed in their existence.

That was because of a book found in the Tower that was often called the 'Tower's Records'.

Skills, traits, monsters, artifacts, and even theory that was hard for Hunters with a Ph.D. degree were all written about in that book and became the foundation of clearing dungeons.

People asked:

Who wrote this book?

Who had this information that nobody else had?

One of the explanations people came up with was the Tower's Records were just a small section of the Akashic Records.

It wasn't a baseless guess.

There were many references to a source of unknown knowledge from a certain dungeon to a certain wall in the Tower.

It was information everyone greatly coveted, but no one was able to reach them. Most hunters had forgotten about the existence of the Akashic Records, but the British Library hadn't given up.

The one that craved that 'knowledge' more than anyone else was the Clock Tower's first headmaster, Grephon.

[We're going to make the Akashic Records.]

[It doesn't matter how many years it takes us.]

[Even if it's a goal we cannot reach, we will try.]

Grephon quickly moved, gathering books, information, and knowledge.

In order for it to be something that could be the foundation of the world, he'd gathered all of the knowledge in existence.

Project number 0.

codeN0.Information.Record.

Noah's Ark.

[In the end, England succeeded.]

[But that's why this project was a failure.]

[It's a contradictory story...]

[This project was successful, but it's a failure because of that.]

It recreated an image barrier through a devil's mana stone, and through the strength of an artifact, England managed to convert the letters and put them inside the barrier.

But they were too greedy.

Just like Icarus, whose wings were burned while trying to fly toward the Sun, Noah's Ark gave desperation to everyone craving knowledge.

[Grephon... Another challenger has failed.]

[Is it impossible to clear the Trial?]

Many people have tried to do it, from elites to hunters, but they'd

given up.

The number of challengers was close to 500.

Project Number 0.

Noah's Ark was an abandoned project; Grephon created the Academy and sealed it inside the Clock Tower.

It was an unlucky project. People thought it was possible just in theory, but after a long time, a new challenger appeared.

—Aris.

She was the person who would be known as Witch and write a new history in the Tower.

Creak-

Aris opened the rusty wooden door and entered the subspace. Although no one knew what happened inside the barrier, most challengers could only last for a minute.

Aris floated inside an infinite time and ended up succeeding.

She'd managed to make all of the knowledge that was inside the barrier hers.

'I admired Aris... She's cool and lonely. She's a person who has her own world. A person who can embrace everyone because she knows how painful it is to be completely alone.'

Only she could understand the loneliness that Aris felt. Besides Aris, Lorelei was the only one who'd managed to clear the Trial.

'What I experienced in the Trial, and endless loneliness... Aris is incredible. She withstood that pain as if it were nothing.'

Lorelei opened her eyes.

[Role - Villain]

[Mission 1 - Activate the prepared Golem and cause a ruckus among the hunter team.]

[Mission 2 - Move to the magic circle that was installed and make sure students can't get out. Protect the barrier.]

She quickly read through the hologram to make the desire of the person she admired reality.

'The barrier is on the terrace... Based on the area, I should be able to reach it in 11 minutes, but if there's a fight, it'll take longer. On the other hand, I don't know how long it will take me to activate the magic circle, but at least I can avoid fighting.'

Lorelei's calculations were fast.

Her judgment was always based on the knowledge she had.

'You need a lot of mana to operate the magic circle. It's how French hunter equipment is always used... '

Activating a golem's magic circle would take more than 30 minutes for a normal student, but the Golem was worth it.

'The defensive line... '

No teachers were left in the academy for balance reasons, but there was still a defensive line—a barricade made with conventional weapons and school equipment.

The golem was a device prepared to destroy that defensive line.

'Gathering students to defend the lines would be faster than using the golem, but teaching them how to fight will probably take some time.'

Lorelei was using her knowledge at an incredible speed.

Her calculations were too fast.

She had organized all her thoughts regarding the match in just 10 seconds and was thinking on the details.

'If I take my time to activate the magic circle, a stronger golem might appear, but the opponent will have more time to teach the students. The most important role is the student council president... Considering the importance, someone needs to be aware of who has the role of student council president.'

Not even Lorelei knew who'd gotten the role of student council president.

It was unknown territory, but she could guess where the student council president was.

'They would be in a narrow entrance. A place from where they'd be able to secure an escape route and where a lot of people can be... I'm sure they're in the 2nd floor's auditorium.'

Lorelei correctly guessed the answer without moving a single finger.

The only thing left was to give her orders.

[Märchen: Move to the generator and the 2nd floor of the Clock Tower.]

[C.M.Sebastian★: Lorelei, I'll go to the generator.]

[Alexander.B: Sebastian, are you really closer to the generator? =o=?]

[C.M.Sebastian★: Sure.]

[Alexander.B: Then I'll go to the 2nd floor.]

Sebastian was going to go to the generator, and Angela would go to

the 2nd floor of the Clock Tower.

Lorelei tried to think of the opponent's strategy, but it was hard to read the opponent's thoughts.

The only thing she could do was wait.

'If I must defeat you... I'd rather do it personally.'

While making a serious expression, Lorelei tapped on the floor.

FWOOSH!!

A golden light rose from the ground.

Swoosh-!

It wasn't that fast, but the golden light moved Lorelei as if it were an escalator.

BOOM-!

The golden light rose into the air while breaking the walls. It was a scene that seemed to have come from a fairy tale. Lorelei looked around while making a blank expression at the Academy.



'I'll check how worthy you are... '

[Shin YuSung: EunAh, take as many students as possible and move to the defensive line.]

Ting!

EunAh checked YuSung's message.

He was asking her to take the students to the defensive line and defeat the opponents. After the siege was over, they would be able to hide the students in a nearby shelter.

But that was only if they could move to the defensive line.

It was hard to control the students amid the confusion at the villains' attack.

"This isn't it..."

"Let's spread out. Maybe the closets will be safer. There's a chance we won't be found..."

"Agh. My leg hurts a lot... It seems like it's a severe wound."

A male student was trembling in the corner, and a female student was crying while holding her knees. Maybe it was because their intelligence was set to low, but she couldn't help but wonder if the students would be of any help.

"Haa..." EunAh grabbed her forehead at the lame attitudes of the students. The 'virtual students' created for the test didn't know the importance of time.

'If it were YuSung, he'd probably make them follow very quickly... '

EunAh wasn't YuSung.

Although she'd always been the class representative, she had never shown leadership or charisma.

She was strong and was the heir of the Shinsung Group; that's why she was given the class representative position.

"Shut up and focus on me!" Kim EunAh shouted.

As the students looked at her, EunAh gave an order as the student council president.

"Everyone, stand up. We're going to the shelter."

"President, what are you talking about? We need to go through the monsters. Haven't you seen them?"

As one of the students countered her, EunAh frowned and let out electricity.

"So will you stay here and wait to be killed by a villain?" she warned.

It didn't work for the students who had already given up on hope.

"It's better to die by the hands of a villain than be devoured by a monster..."

"I... I also don't want to get devoured by monsters..."

EunAh finally understood why the 2nd round of the International Competition was called a 'Comprehensive Evaluation'.

It wasn't just testing your strength as a hunter.

'What... do you want me to do?'

The match was asking Kim EunAh how she was going to resolve the situation. She had never convinced someone with words alone, so it was hard for her.

"You..."

EunAh was about to say something when she closed her mouth.

Convincing someone required you to understand other people. If you couldn't understand the other person's thoughts and empathize with them, you wouldn't be able to convince them.

'They're afraid of the thought of having to face a villain... '

Although the villains were, in reality, Lorelei and the English party members, for the virtual characters, it was reality.

'Fear... '

Everyone gathered there was a student like Kim EunAh; their skills and minds weren't that developed yet.

Kim EunAh felt that she could understand their fear.

[This might be cruel for students to look at, so why don't you close your eyes?]

It was a nightmare-inducing memory for EunAh.

To extort more money from Kim EunAh, The Rebellion's Cheat had said that she would kill Kim JunHyuk.

She'd lifted her head, prepared to step on his head and make it explode.

Cheat's electronically altered laugh had been EunAh's trauma for a while.

She'd dreamt of Cheat stepping on Kim JunHyuk's head more than once.

[I'm sorry. I don't negotiate with the hostage. Why do you think I'm a villain~?]

She'd had not a single bit of remorse.

No, the villain was trying to kill someone as if she found that situation

entertaining. If it weren't for YuSung, both she and Kim JunHyuk would've probably died. That thought made EunAh tremble.

"I..."

While holding her voice, EunAh looked forward. She didn't have natural charisma or leadership like YuSung, she couldn't empathize with others like Sumire, and she also wasn't as good at speaking with others like Amy, but Kim EunAh had real-life experience.

"I'm also afraid, but..." EunAh's eyes became clear. The auditorium went silent.

"But still... I won't stay here and tremble in fear."

If it were her previous self, she might have given up just like those students.

That's why she couldn't blame them, but the past EunAh didn't have a goal—she hadn't wanted to become stronger or achieve anything.

She'd gone to the Academy just because she had talent and for fun. Or maybe it had been because she was forced.

Things were different.

There were things she wanted to protect, she had the goal of trying to make YuSung win, and she also wanted to become stronger.

Besides being class A's representative or the Shinsung Group's heir, she wanted to stay as YuSung's party member.

"Even if I'm alone, I'll go... Even if I'm devoured by a monster, I won't give up before starting."

If she couldn't convince them, that would be better. The moment EunAh was walking toward the exit...

The winds of change blew.

Chapter 149

[Current Score]

Gaon Academy: 0P

Clock Tower Academy: 0P

The points appeared on the screen.

"The match has just started!" Bendom shouted.

Six screens appeared simultaneously.

"All of the participants have to resolve their missions and earn points! How you use your points in the beginning is very important!"

"Yes. Making a strategy and managing time are very important for active hunters... One judgment can save a life, after all."

As Veloce added to Bendom's explanation, his voice gained more strength.

"That's right. I'm already wondering what strategy the participants will use. Let's check on Clock Tower Academy's team first!"

Lorelei moved atop a golden wave to where she could activate the golem.

"Ah! Fast! What incredible speed! But from what I've heard, that golden wave isn't Lorelei's Trait!"

Veloce calmly nodded and said, "Fufu. Yes, that's right. It was unknown up until now because of how low of a profile Lorelei keeps."

"Can you give us more details?"

The conversation they'd prepared beforehand flowed smoothly and aimed to make free publicity for England's pride, Lorelei.

"What she's using is 'Enchantment' of mana. Through pre-made formulas, she can use the mana that comes out as she wishes. Of course, this is only possible if you memorize a huge amount of formulas."

Depending on the shape and the density of the mana in the area, you needed a new formula. You needed a huge amount of knowledge to be able to wield it freely like she was doing.

"It's like..." As Bendom talked as if he'd understood something, Veloce nodded.

"It's the same type of 'magic' that Aris uses. That isn't her Trait but an ability she gained."

"With that, it doesn't seem possible that the English team will lose!"

Bendom tried to put the atmosphere in favor of their team. As a student of the Clock Tower Academy was praised, Veloce made a proud expression.

"That's right. As long as Lorelei is there, no team will be able to defeat the English team. Not even Korea."

There was an uproar among the crowd after Veloce's strong words. After Gates began appearing, Korea had been at the top of the hunter world. To say such a thing on a public broadcast against a country like that was like provoking Korea.

'Since it's Lorelei, it should be okay to say something like this. If the Clock Tower Academy wins, all attention will be centered on the Clock Tower.'

Lorelei didn't care about the negative opinion of others—she only cared about winning.

Veloce could support being ridiculed by a few people if it was for the Clock Tower Academy's position.

When Veloce and Bendom were about to continue with the script, one of the screens zoomed in on someone.

[If it's a barrier like this...]

The screen showed YuSung touching a barrier.

YuSung's role was the '2nd hunter'.

If the hunter or the student council president didn't turn off the generator or solve the barrier issue, he'd have to engage in the fight after 30 minutes.

It had been set like that to show more of the student council president and the 1st hunter.

To balance that, the other side had to activate a golem, which would usually take someone about 30 minutes.

Instead of waiting for people to escape, YuSung was touching the barrier while feeling the flow of mana.

"D-don't tell me..." Bendom stuttered while making a pale expression.

Veloce smirked and shook her head. "Pft. The barrier isn't something that can be broken with strength. It was made with a flow of mana that was generated with complex data..."

Despite what Veloce said, YuSung gathered mana in the palms of his hands.

[This should be enough.]

With a short sentence and everyone's attention on him, YuSung moved his hands.

[Chosen Map - Hunter vs. Villain]

[Starting Place - Clock Tower's entrance]

[Role - Hunter]

[Mission 1 - You must go through the barrier and enter the Clock Tower.]

[Details - The barrier will disappear after 30 minutes. A natural or artificial interference must dissipate the barrier.]

[If the barrier disappears naturally, the Villain team gets 5 points. If the barrier stops before that, the Hunter team will get 5 points.]

YuSung calmly read through the hologram. From what he could read, it said he should wait 30 minutes and then go for the rescue.

'If we dissipate the hologram, the Hunter team will get 5 points. If not, the villain team will get 5 points.'

It sounded simple. One person's actions being restricted was a huge disadvantage for them.

'Since we're in their home ground, I was expecting it... but this is too obvious.'

Although it seemed like both sides were on par, the villain team had the advantage.

[KimSilverA: I'm on the Clock Tower's 2nd floor. My role is the student council president. It will take some time.]

[2siWoo: YuSung, I can move immediately. Should I go to the barrier or the generator first?]

[Shin YuSung: Go to the barrier.]

After reading the messages, YuSung realized what was going on. They'd chained EunAh and set SiWoo free.

It seemed like it was a balance that the organizers set.

'But... destroying the barrier should be a huge profit for us.'

Of course, it wasn't as simple as it sounded.

SiWoo breaking the barrier alone would make things easy for the opposing team.

If he ended up losing in the fight, the flow of the situation would worsen too much.

'If I can dismiss the barrier... '

He couldn't turn off the barrier from the inside, but if he could destroy it, they would be able to gain about 30 minutes and even gain some points.

There was no way that the barrier was weak.

Tap.

There was a faint reaction force as he touched it with his index finger. It was a barrier that reflected the physical force.

If you tried to break it with strength, there was a chance that you'd get hurt.

'In the worst-case scenario, I could get kicked out of the portal.'

YuSung closed his eyes and began feeling the flow of mana. As he increased his concentration, he could feel the senses from inside his body waking up.

BZZT-

It was like faint static electricity.

The wave silently flowed as if it were a river, but YuSung had awakened Super Senses, so he perceived it as a huge wave.

'This sensation... '

After using the Battle God Style 5th Form, YuSung felt a wide variety of mana flows. Sensing the wave of the barrier was easier than his training.

'I can break this.'

His perfect movements were the result of a lot of training.

YuSung felt the barrier with the palms of his hands. He accepted the mana from the barrier and generated a mana wavelength that was exactly the same with the palm of his hands.

As if he were breaking a glass with only the sound, he had to create a mana wavelength that was equal to the one of the barrier.

YuSung made a thick smile as he felt something. There was confidence on his face.

'It's here.'

Battle God Style 5th Form, Wave Resonance.

Blue mana poured out of the palms of YuSung's hands.

WHOOM!

The barrier began vibrating.

Crack-!

A crack appeared, and it began to break down. The blue mana expanded through the fissure in the barrier.

Pang!

The purple barrier completely broke.

It broke into pieces as if it were a mirror. In the middle of a beautiful scene, YuSung looked at the palms of his hands.

'It worked... '

Mana Resonance...

It was something most hunters wouldn't be able to see in their lives. YuSung successfully used that in a real-life situation in front of countless people.

It was a scene that would cause a stir, but YuSung only cared about one person seeing it.

'Master... are you watching?'

YuSung had learned up to the 4th form from his master.

[Hmm... Listen well, YuSung! Once you learn the 4th form, you're going to realize that the Battle God Style is something I created based on my body, so from the 5th form onward, you have to create a new path that suits your talent.]

Create a new path...

That's what Yu WonHak had said to YuSung.

[I'm sure you'll be able to make your own Battle God Style. You're my only disciple, after all.]

Although he was a hard teacher, when he thought about it, everything had been for YuSung.

Yu WonHak wanted YuSung not to be arrogant and always try his best and go further and beyond. He wanted him to become stronger and

reach new heights.

Just like himself, the Fist King.

'I... '

Shin YuSung clenched his fists while looking at the barrier that had broken into pieces and fell into thought.

The Martial Spirits' Mountain...

YuSung had always thought that the relationship between a master and a disciple was like a mirror.

You had to reflect correctly, and you'd end up looking like the one you admired.

His thoughts had changed.

Master and disciple were like a river.

Although it was like a mirror, just a small wave was able to make things completely different.

'Just as you've taught me... I'm going to walk my own path.'

YuSung relaxed his hands. He felt that the subconscious thought that had been holding him down had broken to pieces, just like the barrier.

[The Hunter team has broken the barrier and gained 5 points.]

The match started smoothly.

* * *

They went silent.

Bendom broke the silence and shouted, "Th-the barrier... broke with a

simple hand gesture!"

Bendom was surprised by the broken barrier, but Veloce, a rank 6 hunter, realized that there was a bigger problem than that.

"M-Mana Resonance...?" Veloce mumbled in surprise with her mouth agape.

Mana Resonance was something that would surprise her even if it happened naturally, but YuSung had used it on purpose to destroy the barrier.

'Is that even possible...?'

It was something no other hunter had been able to achieve before. How YuSung used the Battle God Style 5th Form, Wave Resonance to utilize mana would cause an uproar in the hunter world.

It was obvious that Veloce would be surprised.

All of the active hunters had pale expressions on their faces.

"This is the monster that the Fist King raised..."

"Are Korean students... also at this level?"

Veloce anxiously began to bite her fingernails.

'What happened...? Is it an artifact? If it goes like this, the round will... '

Before Veloce could calm down, the screen closed in on EunAh.

* * * *

A speech was the process of trying to convince someone else of something. If you had great speaking ability, you could convince others, but you could also convince others with perfect logic.

Despite knowing that there were many ways to convince others, EunAh picked one called 'honesty'.

"Even if I'm alone, I'll go... Even if I'm devoured by a monster, I won't give up before starting."

Denying her past self, she chose the person she had become with YuSung's guidance.

"Then I... I'll also follow the student council president..." A student that was convinced by EunAh raised their hand.

"What? But there are monsters outside..." Another student tried to convince them, but it was useless.

Kim EunAh's speech spread among the students, and it had caused a change in the atmosphere.

"It doesn't matter! If we stay here, the villains will get us either way!"

"That's right! If they will get us either way, I'd rather go out fighting..."

EunAh facing herself had brought about huge result.

"Yes! I'd also rather follow the student council president!"

Although her heart felt heavy, she was feeling tickles. Although she knew the students were just data, she'd gotten immersed in the situation. Although, because of her personality, she couldn't talk with honesty.

"Okay... Follow me if you want. If you follow, I'm going to make sure... you won't regret your choice."

Unlike her words, EunAh opened the door with strength.

"What are you doing?! Everyone that's going to come, stick close to the president!" The student that followed her first shouted. It was a

moving scene. Kim EunAh subconsciously smirked.

She smiled, relieved as she looked at the students following her.

Then...

"Got you."

The moment she relaxed, someone's voice spread to her ears. EunAh's opponent had erased her traits as if she were an assassin. She'd melt like a shadow in the dark Clock Tower and even erased her mana traces.

"Y-you! How?!" EunAh shouted in surprise, but Angela had already grabbed Kim EunAh.

"We met pretty fast..."

Angela's hand swept over EunAh's body. It passed over her chest and stomach.

"A-are you crazy?! What are you doing?!" EunAh shouted, her face red.

She'd never allowed anyone else to touch her body, but Angela seemed happy at EunAh's reaction.

"That expression. You're truly the best... It's a face worthy of teasing."

"Are you crazy? Let me go."

EunAh activated the mana inside her body and created electricity, but...

Bzz...

The electricity lost strength due to Angela's Trait, which limited the opponent's mana, [Anti Mana], there was a reason why Angela had the nickname of 'The Hand That Doesn't Let Go'.



"Even if you're strong... What can you do without mana? Hmm?"

Due to their closeness EunAh could feel Angela's breath.

"Girls like you... I know them very well. Born from a rich family... your hands never got dirty, right?"

The more Angela touched EunAh's body, the more Angela's cheeks flushed.

"Girls that were raised like you... I really love messing with them. Is it my prejudice? They were all quite prideful."

Angela bit her lips as if she were struggling to hold back.

"What are you saying?! Let me go...!"

The moment Kim EunAh struggled, Angela's hands reached her waist.

Paf!

Angela used EunAh's movements to change position.

Fwoosh!

She hugged EunAh's waist with both arms.

Paf!

As Angela bent her waist, EunAh's body rose into the air.

"Ah...?" Flustered, EunAh let out a short cry.

Angela slammed EunAh into the floor. It was a perfect suplex, as expected from someone who'd done wrestling for more than 10 years.

Chapter 150

Wrestling had proved most useful throughout time, but most Hunters didn't care about physical training at all.

They thought investing their time in mana usage and practicing their Trait was a better use of their time.

- Percentage of weapons used against monsters -

Guns 72%

Custom Hunter Equipment 10%

Swords 2%

Bows 0.15%

Spears 5%

Etc...

Most city guards used guns. It was easy to rely on hunter equipment and your Trait, but training your body and martial arts was hard and required a lot of time.

Still, Angela practiced wrestling. Martial arts went well with her 'Hands That Didn't Let Go'.

Although she couldn't use it against monsters, grappling was very safe and strong against hunters.

Angela was confident she could destroy any hunter or villain with her bare hands.

'To think that I'd be able to grab her... '

BOOM-!

Angela's suplex affected EunAh.

[52% barrier remaining!]

[Residual damage 25%]

[If the cumulative damage reaches 100%, you'll be kicked out of the portal!]

EunAh couldn't read her hologram. Her eyes had turned white from the suplex.

Boom!

EunAh bounced on the floor. She wasn't able to land properly, so an immense pain spread through her body.

"Cough!"

Her expression hardened.

It wasn't the usual active and relaxed EunAh. She was feeling fear toward Angela.

"You! Ack... you!"

Pain was reduced to half within the portal, but to think she'd still feel so hurt... EunAh breathed heavily.

Angela felt satisfied at EunAh's glare.

Slide-

Angela moved like a snake pressed herself against EunAh, and then

she whispered in a low voice, "Yes. It's that expression... One that looks like it's going to break. That prideful expression... I... I... wanted that."

As Angela mumbled while making a satisfied expression, EunAh ground her teeth and swung her fist.

"Shut up!" She was excited, but the technique was good.

Angela easily blocked EunAh's fist with the palm of her hand.

Paf!

"Huh... Not bad?" She made a surprised expression.

Angela thought that she could cook EunAh very easily by blocking her mana, but the fish's reaction was more aggressive than she thought.

Grab-!

Angela smiled while holding EunAh's fist.

"Your punches... are quite unexpected. Does the rich lady want to fist-fight with me?"

"Ugh!"

Angela's grip strength was so high that EunAh felt her fist being crushed.

Press!

Angela got on top of EunAh's back and pressed on her shoulders.

"Hey, pretty girl. Can you see that?"

Angela turned EunAh's head and pointed to the 2nd-floor auditorium.

"Ugh!"

* * *

EunAh looked at the auditorium as she continued to struggle, but the 2nd floor's auditorium was empty.

All of the students that said that they would follow her and even the ones that said they'd fight with her had escaped.

"Th-that..." EunAh mumbled in a low voice.

Angela grabbed EunAh's neck and gradually applied strength so that EunAh wouldn't be immediately knocked out.

Angela could've done a suplex if she wanted to make EunAh lose, but that wasn't her goal.

She wanted EunAh to feel despair.

"Cough!"

"They're AI, data. Despite that, I'm sure they realized who's going to win. That you're going to lose," Angela murmured into EunAh's ears.

"I... won't lose... There's no way..."

Angela pushed EunAh's back with her chest and used her arm to press on EunAh's carotid. It was a rear naked choke. Angela's leg had wrapped around EunAh. Her posture was perfect.

Although she could knock her unconscious in five seconds, Angela ensured she wouldn't faint yet.

"Ugh!"

Her head began to hurt from lack of air. As EunAh's reaction became weaker, Angela smiled.

"I know that expression very well. You want to be comfortable, right? I'm used to it. Everyone makes that expression before hitting the floor."

EunAh once again tried her best to free herself from Angela's choke. Her thoughts got more muddled as time passed.

EunAh began to tear up.

'Why... '

A long time ago, Kim SeokHan had told EunAh, [You're the proud heir of the Shinsung Group. You can have anything you want.]

She'd truly believed that.

When she thought about it, that wasn't the case. As a kid, she wanted to have time with her family, and then when her oppa Kim JunHyuk had gone into a coma, she had wanted to help him.

Now, when she wanted to win more than at any other time...

'What I really wanted... I was never able to get... '

Angela relaxed her arm while looking at EunAh, trying to get hold of herself.

"Are you in pain? Then why don't you answer a few of my questions? If I like the answers... I might let you go once."

"Answers...?"

EunAh's eyes had turned blank.

Angela smiled as if she were having fun.

"Why are you in that party...? I really want to know. You aren't that interested in becoming a hunter, right?"

EunAh wanted to deny Angela's words. She wanted to free herself from the choke and swing her fist while saying, "No", but the more she tried to deny reality, the harder the choke would become. Angela had the advantage.

"Just from your expression, I know... You aren't the same kind of person as us. Is it a rich lady's hobby? Or, ah! I know. Is it... because of that pretty boy?"

EunAh fell into thought while looking at Angela laughing.

'The reason why I'm in the party... '

It was because she had fun while being with her fellow party members. When she was in the party, she wasn't the heir of the Shinsung Group, she was EunAh, a fellow party member.

She wanted to win so she could prove herself as a party member.

And in the middle of that, there was the party leader, Shin YuSung.

'I understand... '

EunAh wanted to win for Shin YuSung.

That was the victory YuSung wanted.

She couldn't understand why, but she wanted to gift him that victory.

"...y."

Angela relaxed the choke, and a low voice came out of EunAh's mouth. Angela was interested in what she had to say, so she relaxed the choke a bit more.

"What? I can't hear you well. Why don't you say it again?"

"...d... t" As EunAh mumbled in a weak voice again, Angela relaxed the choke a bit more in interest.

"Hmm? What...?"

At that moment...

Whish!

EunAh twisted her body and hit Angela's ribs.

The foundation of punching was pushing forward your arm. EunAh had practiced it more than a thousand times under YuSung, so her arms had quite the destructive power.

"Agh!" Angela breathed heavily after being hit in the ribs. EunAh was freed from the choke. She took that opportunity to stand up.

"Yes. As you said, I remained in the party because of the pretty boy, so what are you going to do about it?"

Paf! BZZT!

EunAh used her electricity while looking down at Angela. Since she was free of Angela's hands, she could freely use mana.

It was time to show people why EunAh's potential had been classified as S + .

"I've treated you well, yet...!" Angela shouted while cleaning her mouth.

"That isn't treating someone well, you pervert."

EunAh raised her hands while making a cold expression.

"Orca!"

BZZT! WHOM-!

She used the new skill she'd obtained from defeating the Lake Dragon.

—Thunder Dragon's Descent.

What descended from the sky wasn't a dragon but an orca made of electricity.

Casting an image you were familiar with was easier, after all.

Paf! BZZT! BZZ!

The orca made of electricity started to descend, but it went into EunAh's body.

Pang! BZZT!

EunAh's electricity fluctuated while making a ferocious sound.

"Don't you think that I came prepared for electricity? What do you think I have under the uniform?!" Angela said in a strong voice to hide her frustration.

Although it was hidden under the uniform, Angela had an anti-electricity suit under there.

The anti-electricity suit was prepared to counter EunAh, but EunAh wasn't planning to attack Angela with electricity.

'As YuSung taught me... '

A bit faster...

A bit stronger...

The electricity formed from her mana fortified EunAh's body. Because her Trait was Electricity, EunAh had no limit in terms of speed.

If she could control it, her potential was endless. That was why EunAh's potential was ranked as S + .

BZZT! BZZZZT!

Electricity with a blue color poured out.

"Hey..." EunAh called to Angela in a cold voice. EunAh's hair seemed different from usual thanks to her Trait.

'I'll end it with one attack.'

BZZT! BZZT!

The electricity spread in all directions.

"Try to stop this."

Paf!

EunAh's figure disappeared.

Just like YuSung, an afterimage was left behind.

"Yes! Someone like you...! Once I grab you!"

Angela widened her eyes to try to catch EunAh, but EunAh had increased her speed through her Electricity Trait, so Angela would never be able to catch her.

EunAh finally came to a realization.

She'd borrowed the strength of her Trait. Although she still lacked a bit, it was maybe something similar to YuSung's methods.

She could see it after she swore she'd walk the same path.

"You're too dull."

A blue afterimage passed past Angela.

Only very few hunters were able to see what happened.



"What...?"

Angela turned her head.

[52% barrier remaining!]

[Residual Damage 99%]

[If the cumulative damage reaches 100%, you'll be kicked out of the portal!]

It was too late, EunAh's punch had already pierced her.

BOOM!

Angela knelt from the force of the punch, and EunAh looked down at her while making a relaxed expression.

"I couldn't do it with one punch."

Angela's expression distorted. She'd been humiliated. Despite EunAh's Trait being electricity, she'd lost to martial arts.

"When did you learn such...?"

She had no choice but to admit it...

EunAh's attack with added electricity was too clean. The punch she'd perfected while following YuSung's harsh training regime had shown results.

"You lost, and I won." EunAh crossed her arms and snorted.

She'd proven herself as one of Gaon's Sevens and as a member of YuSung's party.



PdF by: traitor/SEN